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FIRE-EYE, THE SEA HYENA; or, THE BRIDE OF A BUCCANEER.

A ROMANCE OF THE REALITY OF PIRACY DURING THE BYGONE CENTURY.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,

AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," "FREELANCE, THE BUCCANEER," "THE DARE DEVIL,"
"THE CRETAN ROVER," "THE PIRATE PRINCE," ETC., ETC.



"GREAT GOD! IT WAS NO FEARFUL DREAM THEN, BUT A MOST HORRIBLE REALITY!" AT LENGTH BURST FROM THE LIPS OF ROSS VASHTI, AS HE HALF AROSE AND CROUCHED BACK IN ONE CORNER OF THE TOWER.

Fire-Eye, THE SEA HYENA;

OR,
The Bride of a Buccaneer.

A Romance of the Reality of Piracy
During the Bygone Century.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MON-
TEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," "CAPTAIN
KYD," "DARKIE DAN," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

SOLD TO SATAN.

"In the name of Heaven! who are you?"

"The Devil!"

"No! no! no! you do but jest; you are not—"

"I am the Devil!"

"God have mercy on my soul," and the speaker fell his length upon the stone flooring, while in his ears echoed, with the last sense of consciousness, the mocking laughter of the one who had so fearlessly confessed himself Satan.

The two stood in the turret of an old ruin, that for many long years had overhung the sea, and looked off from the English coast.

One time, in the far past, it had been the home of a noble race; but their hot blood had made them live too fast, their large hearts had beggared them, and the last of his name, a mere boy in years, had been driven from his home by a scheming debtor, and forced to seek upon the seas a refuge.

And that debtor had erected upon the broad domain, within sight of the old castle, a lordly mansion; and, won by his wealth a girl-bride, the very maiden that the sailor youth had sworn to return and claim for his own.

What mattered it that he was almost treble her years, so that he held position in the land that his gold bought for him?

What mattered it that one called him father, of whom dark stories were told, for his riches could buy silence?

His bride's name was a noble one, and her father held high title, and yet, being poor, sold his child as a mercantile commodity to the stern owner of Sealands, as his place was called, striving to forget the pledge he had made the boy sailor, Brandt Greyhurst, that when he returned from beyond the seas the Lady Lois should be his wife.

And thus the gold of Ross Vashti had gained him the grand old estate of Sealands, won for him the young and beautiful Lady Lois Norman, the daughter of an earl, and made him as happy as one of his stern, sordid nature could be.

The nuptials were over, the guests had gone, and in an evening stroll Ross Vashti had extended his walk to the old ruined castle of Sealands, and in its main tower had been looking out over the waters, unmindful in his meditations, that night was coming on, for the full moon rising with the going down of the sun, had so blended day and night, that the change was not sufficient to draw him out of his reverie.

Suddenly a low, mocking laugh behind him had caused him to start and turn, and he was aghast with horror, for, not ten feet from him, stood a form such as he had never seen before.

Strange stories were told of the old ruin, of orgies held there on stormy nights by witches and weird revelers, and yet, though avoiding the place when darkness crept over the land and sea, Ross Vashti had believed the stories but the idle tales of old women.

Now, however, standing at the head of the stone stairway leading to the tower he beheld a form which suited all stories he had heard and read, and pictures he had seen, of none other than his Satanic Majesty himself.

Dressed in bright red, with slender, wiry form, peaked nose, sharp chin, long, claw-like fingers, and with wings; and having two horns projecting from his forehead, the strange creature seemed indeed the real Satan, and from the lips of Ross Vashti broke the tremulous cry:

"In the name of Heaven! who are you?"

He had hoped for a different reply—that it was but a joke played upon him by some one, and the answer drove the blood to heart and brain, and down upon the stone floor of the turret he sunk wholly unconscious.

And the one who had thus announced himself gazed calmly down upon the prostrate man, and then sprung nimbly upon the turret wall, and with his winged arms folded upon his heart gazed out upon the moonlit sea, wholly unconscious, seemingly, that two hundred feet below him was the rocky shore beneath the castle, and which the slightest false step, or the tremor of a nerve would hurl him upon.

As motionless and silent as the prostrate man stood the creature who had called himself the Devil, until the few moments that passed seemed hours, and at last Ross Vashti showed signs of returning consciousness.

Then Satan turned a quiet glance upon him, and seeing the eyes open he spread his red wings as though about to fly from the dizzy height.

"Great God! It was no fearful dream then, but a most horrible reality!" at length burst from the lips of Ross Vashti, as he half arose and crouched back in one corner of the tower.

"Yes, I am a reality, Ross Vashti, as you shall know, and I came here to visit you," was said in deep, stern tones.

"Heaven protect me!"

"Silence! Dare you pray to Heaven in the presence of the King of Hell?"

The tone and words brought a cry of terror to the man's lips, and again several moments of silence passed, and then Ross Vashti, feeling his very brain growing cold and knowing that madness would come ere long, said in a low, piteous voice:

"What would you with me?"

"Not thy life, Ross Vashti, if you obey my commands."

"I will do all that is commanded, only spare me."

"Thou art a great sinner, Ross Vashti, and therefore thou pleaseth me; but thy sins have been committed against those upon whom my Satanic regard has been fixed, and for it thou shalt know punishment."

"Mercy!"

"But now thou didst ask mercy of Heaven; but I have no time to waste with thee, Ross Vashti, so will simply say that the hate of thy boyhood caused thee to bring the noble family of Greyhurst to ruin, and, not content with clutching the wealth that was theirs, thou hast stolen from the last of his race his bride, and for it I have placed my seal upon thee."

"Mercy, oh mercy!"

"Ha! ha! ha! I love to hear thy voice in pleading; but I will tell thee now that I lay claim to thy soul just eighteen years from this night, or shall demand of thee all else that thou hast to give: dost swear I shall have the one or the other when I demand of thee the one I desire?"

"No, no, no, I cannot! I dare not!"

"Then from this turret this very minute shalt thou take thy hellward flight with me," and the Devil spread wide his wings again, and sprung down from the wall to the side of the cowering man.

"Mercy! oh mercy!"

"I tell you the word is not known in my vocabulary! Speak! wilt thou live on in wealth and seeming honor, with thy young bride, for eighteen years, and then give me what I choose to demand, or wilt thou this instant take thy hellward flight?"

"Let me live! oh! let me live!" was the pleading cry.

"Then you sell me thy soul when I demand it, after eighteen years from this night have passed, or whatever else in its stead I may claim?"

"Yes, only let me live now!"

"So be it: here, wear this ring, and if it leave thy finger, that instant you forfeit your soul: whoever comes to thee, and asks in the name of this ring thy soul, or aught else, then wilt thou know that he comes from me."

"Thy hand, Ross Vashti!"

The trembling hand was stretched forth, and the man shrunk, as though the touch of the claw-like fingers burnt him.

Then, upon the little finger of the left hand the Devil placed the ring, a solid band of gold, with a red stone set in it.

"This shall protect thee, Ross Vashti, for from this moment know that thou hast sold thyself to Satan."

Ross Vashti made no reply for his tongue could utter no word, and the Devil continued:

"Should that ring fail to remind you of my visit to you this night; shouldst thou, in the bright sunlight, forget that thou hadst sold thy soul to Satan, in return for eighteen long years of wealth, happiness and honor, then look thou in thy glass, and thy snowy locks will recall this night."

"My snowy locks?" gasped the man.

"Yes; I have made thy black hair as white as the driven snow. Farewell, and remember!"

There was a vivid flash of lightning, that blinded momentarily the eyes of Ross Vashti, and when he looked again, his Satanic visitor had gone: but the heavens had suddenly become overcast, the thunder rolled, the lightning flashed, and in terror the man fled down the stone stairway of the turret, sped through the vast ruin, and flying like a deer through the park bounded into the brightly-lighted parlor of his villa, and sunk upon the floor in a swoon.

CHAPTER II.

THE KING'S ARMED YACHT.

UPON a mid-summer's evening, during the past century, a rakish looking cruiser was lying at anchor in the river Thames, not far below the Tower of London.

The glow of sunset yet lingered in the west, and the English ensign came fluttering, like a gorgeous-plumaged bird, down to the deck, for the evening gun had just been fired, and twilight shadows were falling upon land and sea.

Upon the ears of those on the pretty craft fell

the ceaseless hum of voices, the rumble of wheels, and the deep tones of the vesper bells floating from the city.

That the armed yacht was a king's craft was evident, for her officers and sailors wore the livery of the nation, and her being anchored close in toward the London Tower proved that its coming there was evidently an object of importance, as boats had been passing and repassing frequently, between the craft and the gloomy old stone pile within which dwelt so much of misery.

The yacht was a model of symmetry from stem to stern, and her rig proved that she was constructed with an eye to speed and staunch sea-going qualities, while her armament was heavier than was generally seen on a vessel of her tonnage, which was about a hundred and eighty tons.

The mass of the crew were below decks at supper, and the watch on deck, impressed by the gathering twilight, and the gloomy towers of the prison, were spinning yarns of fearful deeds done in that black, menacing pile, which flung its shadows almost over the craft.

The yards were squared and the sails furled with the nicest precision, and the rake of her masts was such that the long silken pennant, with no breeze to fan it, hung down beyond the stern davits.

The masts and spars were of polished black, and the hull was also of the same somber hue, excepting a belt of crimson that ran along the top of the bulwarks fore and aft.

Presently out of her cabin came a tall form, wearing the undress uniform of a captain in the British naval service.

Across his arm was thrown a cloak, as though he expected to be exposed to the chill of the night air, and after a glance at the "Tower," he began to pace slowly fore and aft the white deck.

He was tall in stature, well-made, and possessed the air of one of high birth.

By degrees he relaxed his walk, and presently came to a stand-still, as though so lost in deep meditation as to be unconscious of the movements of his body, and then his noble features became so distorted with his inward emotions, as to mar their beauty, for his lips were severely compressed, his dark eyes scowled beneath the contracted brows, and a suppressed groan issued from between his teeth.

As if the sound recalled him to himself, he started and resumed his walk, and suddenly turning to a junior officer who was near, ordered sternly:

"Mr. Morley, lower away the third cutter!"

"Ay, ay, sir; third cutter away!" cheerily responded the young officer, and the crew sprung to obey, and then stood in readiness awaiting the next order of their chief.

"Mr. Morley, bring the prisoner, Greyhurst, from below, and place him in the cutter; then go to the Tower, and deliver him up to the keeper with a letter which I will give you," and Captain Tudor Vashti entered his cabin, and sitting down at his table wrote as follows:

"To the Commandante of the Tower:

"Sir—I send by one of my officers a deserter from the service, although he wore the uniform of a midshipman in the Royal Navy.

"He is Brandt Greyhurst, lately promoted for gallantry in the Indies, which circumstance you may recall; but his desertion, while in port in the American colonies, places him under the ban of death, and as I may sail at any moment, I send him to your keeping.

VASHTI,
"Captain Royal Navy, and

"Commander H. R. H. armed yacht Lance.

"THAMES RIVER, off London Tower."

Returning to the deck, Captain Tudor Vashti handed the letter to the young officer, and said, sternly:

"Give this to the keeper, with the prisoner, and return at once!"

"Ay, ay, sir," and the officer sprung over the side into the cutter and took his seat at the tiller, and by the side of a young officer in uniform, but from whose shoulder had been torn the epaulette denoting his rank, and who sat with bowed head, and heavy irons upon both hands and feet.

The captain gave a glance over the bulwark at the prisoner, and a grim smile came upon his face; but he made no remark, and the boat pulled away in the direction of the Tower stairs, and was soon lost from sight in the gathering gloom.

Slowly, and with hands clasped behind his back, Tudor Vashti paced the deck, until he heard the officer of the deck hail the approaching boat, and Paul Morley called out:

"All ready, sir!"

Taking his cloak from the bulwark, he threw it around his shoulders, and stepped toward the gangway, which was quickly lined by side-boys.

"Well, sir?"

This abrupt address was to the young officer, who still kept his place at the tiller, and who understanding it, replied:

"I delivered the prisoner to the commandante of the Tower, sir, and here is his receipt."

"Very well; but I take the coxswain with me ashore, Mr. Morley."

The officer reluctantly, or at least with an air

of disappointment, relinquished the tiller and returned on board the schooner, while the cutter went shoreward, urged by the strong, steady stroke of her oarsmen.

CHAPTER III.

A QUARTER-DECK CHAT.

"WHAT the devil is the matter with the captain of late, Manning?" asked Paul Morley, addressing a brother officer as the cutter rowed away, and it was evident that he was in ill-humor at having been disappointed in going ashore.

"I cannot tell, Paul, for he is as savage and silent as those Indians we saw in New York, and has been since we got our batch of mail in the Indies; but I think his dark looks have something to do with poor Greyhurst, whom he has just sent to prison," responded Percy Manning, a handsome young reefer with a dark, resolute face.

"So I think, and more, it seems to me that there is some deep mystery at the back of Greyhurst's desertion, and our sudden return to England, and orders to allow no communication with the shore, though our sweethearts are dying to see us. By Neptune! how he nipped my little game to have a little run up among the theaters to-night, while he was away from the boat."

"He did indeed, and instead of listening to sweet songs ashore, we'll have to content ourselves with the howling of the dogs on the banks; I tell you, Percy, I believe he has incurred the king's displeasure in some way, and has been ordered here to be convenient to the Tower if he is wanted, or—"

"Or what, Paul?" asked Percy Manning, as the other paused.

"Or we have come to take an important prisoner to sea and lose him, for certain it is, we have not crossed the ocean so speedily merely to give the royal family a sea-airing of a few days; but see; the cutter does not land at the Tower stairs, but is pulling up along the shipping, as though the skipper was going up into the city for a lark."

"Well, she is lost in the darkness now, and among the other river craft, so I care not where he goes; only I would like a short run ashore, and to know if we are to sail without seeing our friends. But, come; let us smoke, for I have some of those fragrant Habaneros I got when in the Indies, and their flavor will drive dull care away."

The two young officers were then joined by more of their comrades, and the Habaneros having been passed around, all were soon in the full enjoyment of a fragrant cigar, and willing to chat on the subject that seemed uppermost in their minds, and which Paul Morley after awhile set going by the remark, as he glanced toward the Tower:

"Poor Greyhurst; I fear his doom is sealed." "I fear so, too, for he who enters yonder stone wall may certainly bid a long farewell to hope," replied Percy Manning.

"Comrades, do you know there was something behind the desertion of Brandt Greyhurst?" asked Leo Paulding, the senior of the youthful set of officers on the Lance, and, in the absence of his captain, the commander.

A man of few words, his remark caused all to look quickly into his face for an explanation, and he continued:

"After the reception of our mail in the Indies, I saw that Brandt was deeply moved by letters he had from home, and I was on deck when he went into the cabin and asked the captain for leave to return home at once in the clipper ship that sailed that night; but Captain Vashti seemed to have received news that put him in an ugly humor and sternly refused."

"Then Brandt urged it as a matter of the greatest importance, and being again refused, left the cabin for a few moments, and returned with a paper in his hand, and I distinctly heard his words:

"Captain Vashti, it is so important that I go home at once, and you having refused me leave, that I hand you my resignation, sir, from the Royal Navy."

An exclamation of surprise burst from all the young officers, and Paul Morley asked quickly:

"What then, Mr. Paulding?"

"Why, the skipper took the paper, tore it in two, and threw the pieces out of the stern ports, while he said sternly:

"Go on deck, sir, for I decline your resignation, and you shall not return to England."

"Well," Brandt Greyhurst replied, "I have given it to you, sir, and the Admiralty can determine whether you had a right to refuse it under the circumstances."

"Then he came on deck, and that night, as you know, he dropped overboard and swam out toward the clipper; but the craft was already under way, and he failed to reach her, was picked up by a coffee drogher coming in, and the next day we arrested him in the town, just as he was going on board a vessel bound to New York; now why did the captain refuse poor Greyhurst, and why was he so anxious to return to England, and again, why has the yacht run right across here, when we expected to be away

a year yet, and now being in the Thames, we are not allowed to go ashore, or hold communication with any one from ashore?"

"These are conundrums I am continually asking myself, Paulding, and as regularly giving them up," replied Percy Manning.

"Well, I feel sorry for poor Greyhurst, for a better fellow never wore epaulet, though he is hot-headed when aroused, and would not speak to me when I carried him to the Tower, but he naturally feels blue and sore at heart. By Neptune! that was a bouncing fish that sprung out of the water then!" and Paul Morley sprung to the side and looked over at the swift running river; but, excepting the ripple of the waters nothing was visible, and he returned to his seat on the quarter-deck, just as a dark object appeared under the counter of the yacht, and slowly moved shoreward with the strong and steady stroke of a bold swimmer.

CHAPTER IV.

TUDOR VASHTI MAKES A VISIT.

WHEN the third cutter, after quitting the Lance, neared the Tower stairs, Tudor Vashti aroused himself with a start, and said sternly:

"Not there, sir! Head for the water stairs of St. James!" The coxswain quickly changed the direction in which he was steering, evidently very willing to avoid closer contact with the frowning Tower, and the cutter was soon ascending the river parallel with the shore, which was bordered with shipping, with houses beyond, and long avenues, or streets, here and there, leading back into the heart of the town.

Beneath the majestic arches, supporting the bridges that cross the Thames, the cutter went on its way, here and there turning out for a crossing wherry, and with the hum of the city, the 'heave-yo-yeo' of seamen raising their anchors, and the song of some boatman resounding in their ears, and heard with evident enjoyment by all excepting the silent man reclining upon the crimson velvet cushions in the stern-sheets, and wrapped in the oblivion of his own thoughts.

At length the coxswain ran the boat along the foot of the St. James water stairs, and the captain sprung to his feet, and said sternly:

"Return at once to the yacht, and come back here for me at midnight; but mind you, touch nowhere *en route*, and hold converse with no one."

"Ay, ay, sir," responded the coxswain, and springing ashore Tudor Vashti rapidly ascended the stone stairway, and was soon after traversing one of the dingy thoroughfares that lead from that quarter of London to the western part of the city.

Enveloped in his cloak he held on his way by an obscure street that led into the oldest part of the town, and where men of his bearing and dress were seldom seen.

As though realizing this, his hand beneath his cloak held firmly to the hilt of a dagger, ready to greet any footpad that might spring upon him.

Holding on his way still further into this hive of drones, where obscenity and drunkenness alone seemed to hold high revel, for home happiness and industry had long since taken flight, he soon came to a street of little better appearance, and with altogether a different aspect, for the sidewalks were lined with small shops, dimly lighted, and the show-windows were filled with an assortment of merchandise that made them appear like curiosity-shops.

This was the Jews' quarter, and here the Israelites of London did business, with impecunious Christians as their customers, a fact that seems true almost the world over.

At length Tudor Vashti stopped and regarded a shop on the opposite way from him, and said quietly:

"Yes, that is his den, if I remember correctly; but the accursed shops are all so much alike it is hard to distinguish one from the other!"

Crossing over he read above the door, on a sign that age had sadly defaced:

"Shylock—Money-lender."

Entering the dimly lighted shop, the young captain saw before him a black-eyed handsome Jewish youth in red cap and dark suit, the only occupant of the place, and who was examining with considerable triumph in his face a handsome court dress upon which he had just loaned a sum not one-tenth of its value.

"Where is the Jew?" asked Vashti sternly, and with his face wearing a smile of contempt.

"I am a Jew," was the somewhat proud reply.

"I mean your master, sirrah."

"I have no master; my uncle's clerk I am, but I am not his slave," was the angry response.

"Is Shylock your uncle?"

"He is."

"Then he it is that I wish to see."

"I can attend to any business you may wish, if it is a loan you desire, for just such proud gentlemen as you are come to us poor Jews for gold."

"By the cross! you'll never lend an *onza* if you bridle not your tongue, Jew! go and bid Shylock come to me."

"He is engaged."

"I must see him, for it is a matter of deepest moment."

The young Jew smiled, but said in reply:

"What name shall I give, sir?"

"Tudor."

The Jew turned away, and as he was about to leave the room by an inner door, said:

"Will you keep shop until my return?"

"Curse you! do you take me for a peddler of old clothes? No; I'll let the street rabble sack your accursed den if you hurry not back," was the savage response, and with a light laugh, the young Jew disappeared.

But he was gone only a few moments, and yet that was sufficient for Tudor Vashti to feel humiliated most deeply, for a sailor coming in, half-drunk, and seeing but one person present, and not recognizing his bearing and face, said:

"I say, old Israel, bear down on me with a couple of sovereigns on this spy-glass, for it belonged to the lord admiral once."

"Go to the devil, sir!"

The stern command brought a look from the tar, which caused him to dart out of the door, just as the young Jew entered, and said:

"My uncle will see you, sir; this way, please."

Stooping to enter the low door, Tudor Vashti stepped across the narrow hallway, and instantly a transformation scene burst upon the astonished eyes of the young captain, for, instead of being ushered into a portal on his right, which he knew opened into a dingy office, where he had before visited Shylock, the money-lender, a soft, sweet voice called to him from the left, and he found himself suddenly confronted by a vision of beauty whom he had before met, and yet little dreamed of ever seeing in that quarter of London, while the room he entered was large, superbly furnished, and as luxurious in its appointments as heart could desire.

The sudden metamorphosis from without to within, and the being he beheld before him, seemed to strike the sailor dumb, and he stood gazing in rapture upon the fairylike room and its beautiful occupant, until recalled by a silvery laugh, and the words:

"Captain Tudor Vashti is welcome to the home of Shylock the Jew."

"And you! in Heaven's name, who are you?" he gasped, rather than said.

"I am Adina, the daughter of the money-lender," was the calm response.

"Impossible!"

"No, sir, it is not impossible," was the firm reply.

"I have followed you often when last in England, have let my eyes dwell on you at the opera and at the theater, have chased you when you were riding in the Park, and tried so hard to win one word from you; but you coldly passed me by, when we were near to each other, and at a distance your eyes lured me on, and I believed that you were some fair maid of noble blood and name."

The face of the maiden flushed, and she said, proudly:

"I do possess both blood and name, for my ancestors date back to a time when your fair isle of England was the home of barbarians."

"And yet you are the daughter of Shylock, a Jew?"

"Yes, a money-lender, who can make half the nobles of England beg mercy of him this night," she said, with a sneer.

"Pardon me; I meant not to offend, and we must not quarrel. I am glad at last to know you, be you whom you may, fair girl, and we will be friends if you but permit it," and he spoke in a tone, and with a fascination in his dark eyes that had seldom failed to make themselves felt when turned upon either man or woman.

"I accept the truce, gallant captain; be seated, pray, for you fall to my tender mercies to entertain until my father is at leisure," and the maiden motioned to a silken-cushioned chair for her visitor to take, while she sunk gracefully down upon a divan of Oriental manufacture, and in rapturous admiration the young captain gazed upon her.

CHAPTER V.

THE JEW AND THE SAILOR.

It was no wonder that Tudor Vashti gazed upon Adina, the Jewess, with rapture, for her form was one of exquisite grace in each motion and perfection of outline, while her robe of canary-colored silk suited her dark, Italian-like beauty.

Upon her arms were bracelets of sapphires, her slender fingers were encircled by the ransom of a prince in precious stones, and a necklace of rubies was around her beautifully-molded neck, and sent forth crimson sparks at her every movement.

Her slippers were marvelously small, high-heeled, as was then the fashion, and upon each was a gold buckle studded with rubies.

Like the rich tones of a flute her voice fell in delightful cadence upon the ear, and the perfect contour of her face, with masses of raven-black hair held in coil by a pearl comb, made up a be-

ing of rarest loveliness to look upon, and one whose lustrous dark eyes, full of passion, might lure a man to be either devil or angel.

If Tudor Vashti was enraptured at the beauty before him, Adina the Jewess, seemed also to be deeply interested in the young captain, and had, in fact, as he had said, in meeting him in her rides and at the opera, encouraged him by her glances, and, after several of these accidental meetings, had taken the trouble to find out just who and what he was.

For some moments the conversation between the two went pleasantly on, and then it was broken by the entrance of a tall, well-formed man of fifty perhaps, with a resolute, strongly marked face that would have been noble in expression, were it not marred by a certain look of avarice and cunning that played in his eyes and around his mouth.

His hair was long, black, and streaked with gray, and he wore a long mustache that in a measure hid his moral weaknesses that hovered about his full lips.

Physically he was a splendid specimen of his race; morally he was the cruel, merciless usurer.

Without the slightest accent, and with the air of a man who knew his power, he said in his deep tones:

"I am honored by a visit by Captain Tudor Vashti. Adina, my child, this is my friend, Captain Vashti, but I see you are already acquainted."

The young captain's face flushed at the name of friend being applied to him by the Jew; but he kept back the hot words that rose to his lips, remembering that the want of gold sometimes made the slave the master, and said calmly:

"Yes, I have before met your beautiful daughter, Shylock, though never dreamed that you could be her father."

"You came to visit me, I believe, Captain Vashti," said the Jew, quickly, and in a tone that showed he did not exactly like the remark of the sailor.

"I did, sir," was the haughty reply, and the Jewess arose and with a smile and bow left the room.

"I believed you were in American waters, captain, but I am glad to see that you are again in London, and in time to redeem your paper, which comes due within the week," said Shylock, when the two were alone.

"So I should be in American waters, Jew; but receiving your letter, refusing to renew my paper, I boldly came to London, trusting in the clemency of the king to pardon me for acting without orders."

"And the notes alone brought you, captain?"

"You, I believe, are interested only in the notes you hold of mine," was the haughty response to the question.

"I am interested in you, my dear captain, and I ask again, if the notes alone brought you back to London?" was the suave inquiry.

"You know I am ruined if they are not paid, or arranged for," evasively said the sailor.

"True, but you have another motive, strong as is that one, in being here."

"Well, what is it?"

"I believe the senior Vashti has taken unto himself a young bride."

"Curse him, yes!"

"Ah! you arrived in London too late to prevent your father marrying the fair Lady Lois, and taking her for your own bride?"

"Curses! yes; but what could have induced the old fool to marry the child, for she is not eighteen?"

"Perhaps the motive that caused you to offer her your hand and heart, by letter, the day you sailed for the Americas."

"What! did you dare tell him, Jew, what you told me?"

"Yes, Tudor Vashti, I did tell him that she was to fall heir, when she reached the age of twenty, to a vast property left her by an uncle, who earned it in India, and died in my house in Calcutta, but wished the secret of the inheritance to remain unknown to her and to the earl, until after she married, thinking thereby that she would marry a man who wedded her for love and not for her gold."

"And you told my father this secret, after divulging it to me?"

"I did, for I have other plans for you," was the cool response; but it brought the hot words from the sailor.

"Thou accursed unbeliever, do you dare speak of me as though I were your slave?"

"Money makes all on an equality while we trade in it, Captain Vashti, and for the time we are equals."

"What! you my equal?" almost shouted the captain in a frenzy.

"I said for the time being you were my equal, sir; but hold! let us not quarrel, but resume where we left off; I say I have other plans for you, and they will bring you even more gold than would the Lady Lois have done."

"Name the plans," was the stern command, the magic word of gold having, in a degree, ameliorated the temper of the young sailor.

"Are you very thick skinned?" almost insolently asked the Jew.

"What! do you desire to insult me?"

"Oh, no, I only desire to probe you, to see what you can stand."

"You will urge me on to hurl you beneath my feet, Jew!" was the savage reply.

The Jew arose to his full height, and said calmly:

"Tudor Vashti, Enoch Shylock fears no man, and the instant you stretched forth your hand to me in anger, that instant would you fall a corpse at my feet."

Impressed by the commanding, fearless manner of the Jew, the young captain replied quickly, for he could not but feel respect for him:

"I mean you no harm, Jew, but you drive me to madness by your insulting words."

"I ask you again, how thick is your skin to stand bad tidings?"

"Great God! does my father know of—no, no, he cannot—that is, there is little to know. In the Devil's name, Jew, what do you mean?" and as Enoch Shylock sunk down in his seat, the young captain arose livid and nervous, and confronted him.

"I mean, Tudor Vashti, that I have a bitter tale you must hear, and yet, if you are not over fine in feeling, it may be lightened by the clink of gold; but be calm, man, for it is not of your deeds I would speak, but of the acts of others that deeply concern you."

"I fear my father suspects that I have done some wrong and intends to cut off my allowance, until his death makes it mine by right; in this case, Jew, I am ruined, for my pay is not enough for pin money for a milk-maid."

"You know best what wrongs you have done, Vashti; but, as I before said, it is of the wrongs of others I would now speak, so be seated and listen to me, for I have a secret that will startle your ears, as does the moaning of the coming tornado; are you calm?"

"Yes, say what thou hast to say," was the stern response, and the sailor sunk back in his chair.

CHAPTER VI.

THE JEW MAKES KNOWN A SECRET.

"I AM ready to hear your secret, Jew, be it good or bad," said Tudor Vashti, as Shylock remained silent for some seconds, after the two were seated.

"It is your secret, Captain Vashti."

"Be it whose it may, tell it me, for life is too short, Jew, for me to spend my time here," was the impatient response.

A sinister smile crossed the face of the Hebrew.

"Your father, Ross Vashti, gave you every advantage that money could buy," he asked calmly.

"Yes, he made me a gentleman, and it remains with me to keep or lose the title by my deeds," was the bitter reply.

"He gave you, I believe, an estate worth thirty thousand pounds, upon your coming of age three years ago?"

"Yes, and you hold mortgages on it amounting to twelve thousand, which I cannot pay."

"I am aware of that, captain; but tell me, did you ever know your mother?"

"No, she died in giving me birth."

"Ah; it is sad not to know a mother's love," with a sneer.

"I did not know my mother, but there was one I loved as such, for indeed she was a mother to me, and had she lived until I grew to manhood, I would have led a different life," and the voice was full of sadness; but changing his tone, he asked:

"Why do you ask these questions concerning my family and myself, Jew?"

"From interest in finding out what you know of yourself, Captain Vashti."

"And what is your discovery?"

"That you are in utter ignorance of who and what you are."

"What! do you dare insinuate that I am different from what I tell you?" was the fierce question.

"I insinuate nothing, sir, I state only facts; you are not what you seem, and that is the secret I have for your ear."

"You are a fool, if you think you can deceive me with your concocted stories, Jew."

"He enjoys his laugh most, Captain Vashti, who laughs last; but I am losing time, so I will at once say that you are not the son of Ross Vashti."

The young sailor sprung to his feet, and cried savagely.

"In the Devil's name whose son am I then?"

"The King's!"

The reply, uttered in a decided tone, seemed to take from Tudor Vashti all power of utterance, and he sat vacantly staring at the Jew, whose face remained cold, sinister and cruel.

At length he said in a hoarse tone:

"Jew, in your teeth I throw the lie, for you would imply a stain upon my name by your words."

"I imply nothing, Tudor Vashti, but boldly assert that you have royal blood in your veins, and that you are the son of England's King."

"A disowned son, a—"

"Yes, one not publicly acknowledged yet not

one who was born in dishonor. Listen if you would hear the story."

"I will hear all you have to say," and the young sailor bent his head upon his hand.

"The king, as you have heard, in his young days was a wild, dashing youth, and when sent to rusticate for a few months, after some mad freak, he met a young and beautiful girl, the sister of a poor landowner."

"She knew not who he was, though her brother ferreted out his *incognito*, and she loved him, as he did her, and the two were secretly married."

"The brother had played the spy upon their actions from the first, and after their secret marriage, made known to the youthful king what he knew, and then the thunderbolt burst with fury, for English laws annulled the marriage, and His Highness went back to London in sorrow, and in shame at the dishonor he had brought on one whom he really loved."

"The two never met again, Captain Vashti, for the deserted wife remained as secluded as a nun, and gave birth to a son, whom she never lived to see grow to manhood, for she died when he was in his sixteenth year."

"I never heard of this act of the king, Jew."

"Oh no; it was kept a dead secret, except among those who were forced to know of it, and you never heard either, that you are this son of the king and the unfortunate girl?"

The sailor again sprung to his feet, and paced the floor for a moment in deep and painful thought: then he said slowly:

"Jew, you have to give me proof of this."

"I will; do you remember having heard that Ross Vashti, in his younger days, was a poor land-owner, and made all his money by speculating in city property?"

"Yes."

"Where did he get this money to speculate with, my dear captain?" was the sinister question.

"Ask him."

"No, I ask you."

"I know not."

"I do."

"Then why the devil do you ask me?"

"Because I wish you to know; he was the brother of the maiden whom the king secretly married."

"Hail you insinuate that he was paid to keep the secret?"

"I do."

"Go on."

"It was your aunt Infelice, whom you referred to as being a mother to you?"

"Yes."

"She was the sister of Ross Vashti?"

"Yes."

"She was your mother."

"Good God!"

The intense surprise and feeling portrayed by the sailor pen can not express, as now there came before him the belief that the Jew had told the truth, for a thousand things flashed before him to prove that the secret of his birth was a true one, and in deepest, painful reverie he remained for some time.

Then he asked:

"Be more lucid, Jew, in your story; why has Ross Vashti borne the name of my father before the world?"

"His is a sordid nature, Captain Vashti, and knowing that he held a secret that was a golden revenue, he used it for his own good."

"He had married about the time the king secretly wedded his sister, and his wife died in giving birth to a child, born the day that you were born; but the child was dead, and this secret was kept from all but the king himself, and you were raised as his child, and your royal master made Ross Vashti the wealthy man he is, and gave to you your estate, which you mortgaged to me, and gave to him gold to give you, and which he kept his percentage of, you may be assured, knowing his sordid nature."

"Yes, you are damnable alike, I assure you Jew; but now I understand his liberality toward me and miserly conduct toward all others, and, Enoch Shylock, I believe your story, and shall use it to my advantage," and a triumphant, sinister light came into the dark eyes of Tudor Vashti—a look which the Jew did not at all like, for he said quickly:

"Hold on, captain, do not go too fast."

A mocking laugh was the response, and the young sailor took up his cloak and hat, as though to depart, when he suddenly was confronted by the Jew, his face white, his manner resolute, as he said in stern tones, at the same time leveling a pistol full at the heart of the naval officer:—

"Sit there, Tudor Vashti, for I have more to tell you."

CHAPTER VII.

A GAME IN WHICH A WOMAN WON.

IMPRESSED by the threatening manner of Enoch Shylock, Tudor Vashti, with a livid face, resumed his seat, and the Jew also sat down, and, after an instant of silence, said:

"Tudor Vashti, you hold a secret which you have no right to divulge; a secret that has been kept as though buried in the grave, on one account only."

"And that is?"

"The penalty of death hangs over all who know it, if it is divulged."

"Bah!" was the contemptuous exclamation.

"Oh, sir, I know that in your calling you face death almost daily; but you do not face the death that awaits those who know this secret, should one of their number prove false and betray it."

"I tell you, those who held power were determined that this wild freak of their king should not go abroad, and the law of death was passed as a penalty against all who knew it, should any one betray it, and that doom is, to die in a dungeon of the Tower by torture."

The young sailor, brave and reckless as he was, shuddered at the words of the Jew, and again a silence fell between them for a moment, until Tudor Vashti suddenly broke it by asking:

"How knew you this secret, Jew?"

"I will tell you; I had, and still have important dealings with Ross Vashti, and after some of our transactions, he sent me a roll of important papers, to keep for him as he was moving to his new country estate of Sealands, which you know he robbed the Greyhurst family of."

"By mistake, he inclosed among them a small package, which he had intended depositing in the bank for safety, until his safe was ready at his villa, and there were the letters that had passed between Infelice and the king, and himself and the king, making known the whole story of the wedding, separation, discovery, penalty of betrayal, and your birth, and the fact that Ross Vashti was to claim you as his son."

"And you read these secret papers?" sneered the sailor.

"Of course; I saw that they were private, and I skillfully broke the seal, read them, and then told Ross Vashti, when he came to me in dire alarm, that they had not been opened, and after a close examination of them, he believed me."

"Well, to what does all this tend?" impatiently asked Tudor Vashti.

"You are in need of money, I believe?"

"You know that I am."

"I will give it to you."

Tudor Vashti looked up in surprise, and said:

"Yes; for usurious interest."

"No; on fair terms."

"What?"

"I mean it."

"But you need security."

"Only some names."

"What names?"

"Yours and one other."

"Whose?"

"Your father's."

"The king's?"

"Ah, I forgot; no: Ross Vashti's."

"He will see me in Hades first."

"Don't ask him."

"What mean you?"

"Write it for him."

"Hah! you dare insult me by such a proposition?" and the young sailor was again on his feet.

"Oh, no; I merely tell you to do what you have done before."

Tudor Vashti turned livid at this bold charge and remained silent, while Enoch Shylock said:

"I have in my iron box there, Tudor Vashti, a draft drawn in your favor by Ross Vashti, and which was cashed for you before you sailed to the Americas, by his bankers; your notes to me, on which you got money, aided in taking up that draft before maturity, and to do so, you left the money in the hands of one of your friends, who gambled a part of it away and in despair came to me to raise the amount desired upon certain personal valuables of his own."

"They were not worth half the money, and subject to fainting attacks, in his alarm, he fainted away in my office, and a little drug kept him from returning to consciousness until I had examined his papers, and I found on him the letter, stating you inclosed the money to take up a certain draft."

"He had not suspected you, but I did, and when he revived, I told him if he would call on the morrow I would arrange the loan for him."

"I then went and took up the forged draft, and I hold it against you, and when he came I loaned him the money on his valuables, and I suppose you know the result?"

"I heard from home that he had committed suicide."

"He did; intoxicated by the possession of so large a sum, he tried to double it, lost it at the gaming table, and drove a knife to his heart."

"And you have that draft?" said the young sailor in a low tone.

"I have; and I will cash another for you of a like kind," was the cool response.

"You wish me to again commit forgery?"

"What matters it?"

"Ruin will follow."

"Oh no, you can take up the paper, with what you win at the gaming table."

"Curses on the gaming table! it has been my ruin already, for I have lost my fortune by it."

"Try again," was the laconic remark.

"Would you lure me on to still greater ruin?"

"Yes."

"How have I wronged you, Jew?"

"You have not wronged me; I wish you to be in trouble that I may serve you; now do you wish to pay those notes I hold?"

"I have no money."

"I will let you have it."

"Again I ask for what?"

"Simply on your name, say your note of hand for the sum you desire, and the indorsement of Ross Vashti."

"But I tell you he will put his name to no paper of mine, and besides, I do not wish him to know I need money."

The Jew laughed, a low, sinister laugh, and said:

"It is as I thought, Captain Tudor Vashti the notes I hold of yours for ten thousand pounds, now about due, have on them the forged indorsement of Ross Vashti."

Again Tudor Vashti became livid, for he saw that the Jew had overmatched him in cunning; but after a few seconds of thought he said:

"I may as well admit it; the draft you hold would condemn me without the notes, and I frankly confess to you, Jew, that the indorsement is unguine, and it was the fear of having you present them to the man I then believed my father, that brought me back to England without orders."

"Well, write new notes, say at the same length of time, to cover the sum I gave you on them, with what I lost on the personal effects of your suicidal friend, and the amount I paid to take up the draft, with what other money you may wish, and I will cash them for you, less twenty per cent."

"You are generous," was the sneering reply.

"Yes, for I should have charged you forty, as I did before."

"And I must indorse by Ross Vashti."

"Of course, otherwise your note would be worthless, for I hold mortgages on all you own."

"You have some deep motive in this?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"I prefer to let time develop; what amount will you make the note?"

"Twelve thousand pounds for three months, for I need a thousand to see me through my stay here in London."

"Write the note!" was the stern command, and the Jew handed the sailor a pen.

In a bold hand he wrote the note and signed it.

"Now indorse it!"

In a skillful manner he forged the signature of Ross Vashti, though his hand trembled a little as he did so.

"Now here are your old notes, Tudor Vashti," and the Jew handed them to him.

"And the draft that I gave poor Vincent the money to take up?"

"I shall keep that."

The eyes of the sailor flashed, but he said nothing, and taking out of his iron box a roll of crisp bank bills he counted out the amount due the young officer and handed them to him, with the remark:

"This should last you some time, Vashti, but a fool and his money are soon parted, you know."

"No comments, Jew," and as the officer leant forward to take up the bank bills, he saw his own notes, and the draft, within reach of his grasp, and seized with a sudden desire to destroy all proof of his dishonor, he suddenly grasped them, and as quickly drew from his breast a dagger and held it above the heart of the Jew, crying savagely:

"Hold, Jew! or you shall die, for I am a desperate man, and I will have these proofs of my guilt, and your money you can keep, though you have robbed me of a far larger sum by your usurious interest."

Enoch Shylock knew that he had to deal with a desperate man, and he was aware that the slightest movement would cost him his life, so he moved not an atom, but from his lips came an exclamation of alarm, and almost instantly it was answered by the words, in a firm but musical voice:

"Sir, you are in my power, not my father in yours."

With a startled cry, Tudor Vashti turned to behold behind him, half concealed by a heavy velvet curtain, the slender form and lovely face of Adina, the Jewess, and in her hand she held firmly a revolver leveled at him, and her look and attitude told him that he was indeed at her mercy.

CHAPTER VIII.

STRANGELY MET.

It was a striking tableau for a moment, and one which was full of danger to both Tudor Vashti and the Jew, for the face of the former had lost its nobleness and was frenzied with desperate determination, and he still held his knife threateningly, and as though determined to strike, and dare the shot of the maiden, or to test her nerve to fire and save her father.

But Enoch Shylock knew well the girl's nature, and he said, calmly:

"Lower your weapon, Adina, for the captain had perhaps cause to attempt my life, and caught me unawares; but he will not make the attempt again any more than will I be taken at disadvantage; you are a brave girl, and I owe you my life."

Instantly the maiden lowered her weapon, and as quickly the arm of Tudor Vashti dropped to his side, while he said, earnestly:

"You are indeed a brave girl, and worthy the love and esteem of any man, and warmly do I thank you for preventing my adding another sin to the catalogue against my name."

Adina smiled, and in the smile there was a look of forgiveness; but without a word she lowered the curtain and was lost to sight, while the Jew said coldly:

"There is your money, sir, and I warn you, royal-blooded though you be, not to betray the secret you have this night heard from my lips."

"I am not anxious to make known my own shame, Jew, for as the marriage between my royal father and unfortunate mother was annulled, I certainly am a child of shame; so be it, I have this night proven myself a man of dishonor by forging the name of him I believed my parent; good-night, Jew," and the officer turned away, and his host quietly and without a word conducted him to the outer door.

With his money in an inner pocket, and his cloak folded around him closely, he wended his way rapidly through the wretched thoroughfare, avoiding as much as possible the crowd of half-drunken loungers here and there grouped in the street, and unheeding, as was his wisest course, the ribald jests and abuse heaped upon him for being better dressed than were the denizens of that low quarter.

Hours had passed while he was in Shylock's house, and it was getting late, but still he seemed to shun the better streets, until he left the Jews' quarter, near Monmouth street, when he turned into an alley, dimly lighted that led to a more fashionable thoroughfare.

But hardly had he gone ten paces, when out from a shadowed doorway there sprung three men, and in an instant he was in their rough, rude grasp, and that their intention seemed both murder and robbery was evident.

Tudor Vashti was a man of strength above the average, and as quick and agile as a panther; but unsuspecting attack, he had been seized, and his arms pinioned before he could offer resistance, while a hoarse voice cried:

"Knife him, Tom, while Jack and I hold him, and we'll be even for the forty blows o' the cat he put on our bare backs."

In an instant he knew the three men, as deserters from his vessel the night before, and desperate fellows whom he had punished severely for misdemeanors during the last cruise, and he knew well that his steps had been dogged, and that they would kill him for revenge, and rob him for grog money, and knowing how helpless was a struggle, he raised his voice in one loud, ringing call:

"Help, here!"

Just as the cry left his lips a form passed the head of the alley, and like an arrow darted to the rescue, and, ere the assailants of the officer could turn to meet the attack of the man who had so promptly answered the call, two of them had been felled to the earth, and the third was in the grasp of one who was his master.

"My brave fellow I owe you my life; let me help you with that villain, and then I'll deliver the three to the guard to send back on board my ship, from which they deserted," and, as Tudor Vashti spoke he felled the third man to the pavement, just as two of the city guardians of the peace ran up to the spot.

"Officers, these three men are deserters from my vessel, His Majesty's yacht Lance, and they dogged my steps to waylay me, so bear them to the St. James water stairs, and give them over to the coxswain of my boat that awaits me there."

"Pardon me, sir, but you are—"

"Captain Tudor Vashti."

"All right, sir; we will obey you," said the man politely, and the three seamen were quickly ironed and arose to their feet in sullen silence at the orders of the night guard, while the officer asked quickly:

"Where is the gentleman who came to my rescue so nobly?"

"He walked away, sir, as we came up, and turned the corner to the left," answered one of the guard.

"I must see and thank him; here, take this and drink my health, and do not let these three devils escape you," and so saying Tudor Vashti started rapidly away, in pursuit of the stranger who had so fearlessly answered his cry for help, and did such good service after his arrival, to slip modestly away as though to avoid thanks.

Swiftly disappearing in the distance he recognized the tall, agile form, and walking rapidly, he, after a while came near enough to hail him:

"Hold, comrade, for I would have a word with you," he cried.

The stranger glanced back, and by the light

of a swinging street lamp, recognized the cloaked form of the officer and started, as though about to run away; but checking his purpose, he turned and faced him, and said calmly: "Well, Captain Vashti, what would you with me?"

"Ha! you know me?"

"Yes."

"And you saved my life a while since?"

"Yes."

"And you are—Great God! you are Brandt Greyhurst!" and Tudor Vashti started back in unfeigned astonishment, while the other said in the same quiet tones:

"Yes, I am Brandt Greyhurst, whom you ordered sent to the Tower as a deserter a few hours since."

"And you escaped?" asked the still amazed captain.

"No."

"You did not go?"

"I did not go."

"There was treachery then on my vessel, for I ordered Mr. Morley to deliver you to the commandante, and he has dared to—"

"Hold, Captain Vashti, do not suspect Mr. Morley, for he believed that he took me to the Tower; but it was not *me* that he delivered to the commandante."

"More mystery?"

"I will solve it, sir: Midshipman Holbrook Friedland is the son of the commandante of the Tower, as you perhaps have heard, and he is, as you know, so strikingly like me that we are often called the twins."

"He is my friend, my *confidant*, and knowing *why* I wished to come to England, he nobly offered to take my place, aware that his father, when he confessed all to him, would not hold him in durance vile, and that the influence of the commandante would prevent his being punished for what he did."

"Disguised in one of my suits, and in irons, he passed for me, and I, after you left the yacht, slipped overboard swam ashore, and was just coming from a Jew's store, where I fitted myself out, as you now see me, when I heard your cry for help."

"And nobly rescued me, nay saved my life, Greyhurst, and I thank you for it from my inmost heart; but you are a deserter from my vessel, and, *you are my prisoner*."

Out from beneath the cloak came the hand of the captain, and in it was a pistol that he had cautiously drawn from an inner breast-pocket.

"What! would you do me this wrong, Captain Vashti?" cried the indignant young man, offering no resistance, as he knew his instant death would follow.

"I am sorry for you, Greyhurst, but my duty to my king demands that I arrest you, and this time I will take you to the Tower and there shall be no mistake as before."

With a sigh Brandt Greyhurst seemed to submit to his fate, and, thrown off his guard, Tudor Vashti lowered the threatening weapon, when, quick as a flash there came in his face a stunning blow and he dropped his full length on the pavement.

"Lie there, Tudor Vashti, and remember that my hand has but struck the first blow of revenge I will treasure up against you."

So saying, the disgraced midshipman turned quickly away, just as Tudor Vashti sat up, and rubbed his hand across his forehead, as if striving to recall his numbed senses.

At length he arose to his feet, and glancing around him saw that he was alone.

Stooping he picked up the pistol that had fallen from his grasp, and said, savagely:

"Curse you, Brandt Greyhurst, that blow shall cost you your life!"

Again folding his cloak around him, he strode down the street, and soon after reached the stairs at the foot of which his boat awaited him.

"Ha! my worthies, you are here," he said, fiercely, as he discovered the three deserters, and springing to his seat in the stern sheets, he gave the order to pull for the yacht in a tone that set the oarsmen to work with a will, for they saw that their chief was in no humor to trifle with.

CHAPTER IX.

A GREYHURST OF SEALANDS.

WHEN Brandt Greyhurst walked away from the prostrate captain, he wended his steps in the direction of the strand, and, as though fully acquainted with the mazes of streets, held on until he arrived at a public hostelry, at the door of which he knocked for admittance.

"Closed for the night; no admittance," said a gruff voice within.

"Oh yes, Sands, don't be inhospitable to an old friend," replied the young sailor.

"Who are you?" asked the same voice.

"Greyhurst of Sealands."

"Foxhounds and racers! why didn't you say so before, Master Greyhurst, for never would I have my doors closed to one of your name," cried the voice in a very changed tone from the first reply, and the door was instantly swung open, showing a half-dressed, stout man with lamp in hand.

"Not even now that the name is all I can

boast of, Sands?" said Brandt Greyhurst, in answer to the last remark of the proprietor of the hostelry.

"No, Master Brandt, for all I possess I owe to the liberality of your father, and those before him; come in, sir, come in, and let me grasp your hand, though I looked not for such pleasure, as I thought you were over the sea."

"No, our vessel arrived but lately from the Americas, and important duties carry me out home at once, and I wish a good horse from you."

"The best in the stables, Master Brandt; here, Silas, saddle and bridle Whalebone and bring him to the door! and Master Brandt, when you get to Perkins's Inn, make him give you Runaway for a remount, and the two will carry you to Sealands finely; but I thought the old place, sir, had gone out of your hands?"

"So it has, Sands, but there is something there I need to look after."

"Why how remiss I am; come in, Master Brandt, and take a drop to warm you before you go, and you shall have a saddle flask to carry with you; sit there, sir, while I get it, and it was some of the old brandy your forefathers loved, and you will find it still better, for it is older now, then when they were sporting gentlemen."

The young sailor threw himself in a tired way into a chair before the table, and the lamp fell full upon him, displaying a fine, athletic form, a face that was manly, resolute, and of rare beauty of feature withal, while his brown curls clustered around his forehead and neck and his dark, fiery eyes, made up a *tout ensemble* of manliness and womanly perfection of form and feature, seldom seen in mankind.

He was dressed in a hunting suit of the times, carried a cloak across his arm, and was fully equipped for a journey.

Presently the host returned with a flagon covered with cobwebs, and a small flask in hand, and the liquor was poured out and the health and happiness of the young sailor drank in a bumper.

"Now put this in your saddle pocket, Master Brandt, it will help to make the miles shorter, and when you return let this be your home," and Sands forced the well filled flask upon him, just as Silas came to the door and announced that Whalebone was ready.

Brandt Greyhurst drew from his pocket, a roll of bank notes, to pay for the hire of his horse; but Sands would not receive them, saying earnestly:

"Not from you, sir, the horse is yours if you will take him; the Greyhursts gave me what I possess, and I am not a poor man, so offer me no money, Master Brandt, unless you wish me to feel hurt."

The young sailor grasped the hand of the honest innkeeper, threw a piece of silver to Silas, and springing into the saddle darted away on the splendid sorrel, with the seat of one who had been reared in the saddle.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE FLOWING TIDE.

THE sun was just nearing the western horizon, as a horseman drew rein, half turned about, turned back again, and seemed undecided which way to go, while upon his face rested a troubled look, as though there was some pressure of coming evil upon his heart.

The horseman was Brandt Greyhurst, and he was within two leagues of the home of his race, or rather that had once been the estate of his forefathers.

Thoroughly acquainted with the surroundings, to spare his tired horse, he had taken a cut along the base of a cliff, upon the beach, rather than a climb of double the distance over the hills, and had gone but a couple of miles along the sandy shore when he realized his mistake.

And it was a mistake that had cost many a noble life on that same beach, for the tide was coming in, and like a wall the cliff ran ahead and behind him for miles, with not a single break in it, and towering half a hundred feet above his head.

With nothing to check its onward flow, the incoming tide came on, rising higher and higher toward high water mark upon the cliff, and which was on a level with the back of the tired steed.

"I was a fool to forget the tide," muttered Brandt Greyhurst, as he sat an instant in uncertainty whether to go back or onward, while the waves washed the fetlocks of his horse, for they were in a place that had been washed out by the waters.

As if, feeling that he must quickly do one or the other, he suddenly called out to his horse, and determined not to go backward, urged his horse into a full run.

But the animal was tired, the sand was heavy, and the distance to safety was a long way ahead, while the waves seemed to wish to show how futile was the attempt to escape their fury, and rose higher and higher with savage fury.

"We cannot make it, old horse, and I fear you must go," cried Brandt, as he suddenly

drew rein, for his horse was floundering in the waters up to his knees.

"Come, we must go seaward, or we'll be dashed to pieces against the cliff; if you are not tired out you may be able to swim to the cove; if not you must go down, but *I will not*."

There was a look of resolute determination on the young sailor's face not to say die, and with the next out-going wave he turned his horse seaward, and the noble animal was the next moment swimming bravely.

A hard struggle it was to get out of the surf but at last the perilous deed was accomplished, and the horse and rider were in open water.

But the young man saw that his horse would not last, and he at once determined to save himself, and raising his feet he pulled off his boots, and then threw aside his cloak and outer clothing.

Hardly had he completed his arrangements for his hard struggle for life, when he felt his horse sinking beneath him, and he slipped off into the sea, and, relieved of his weight, the noble animal made another effort to save himself.

But he was tired out with his long journey, the run on the sands had fatigued him more, and the struggle with the waves had utterly prostrated him.

Piteously he looked at his rider, as if for help; but though the youth was deeply pained to see him die, the life of the brute must be sacrificed for the human, and he swam out of the way of the struggling beast.

As if frenzied by his avoidance of him, when he sought aid and sympathy, the horse grew vicious, and snapping his white teeth swam after his rider with a speed the youth had not believed him capable of, and gained upon him too, although Brandt was a superb swimmer.

Diving deep, he avoided the attack of the now crazed animal, and coming up some distance away, he saw that the final struggle had come, for the last effort had been a dying, false strength, and the drowning beast was sinking beneath the waters.

A moment more and he had sunk from sight forever, and, with a sigh, the swimmer headed up the coast, in the way in which he had been riding when checked by the inflowing tide.

The long wall of cliffs seemed interminable to the lone swimmer, and hope of life in that wild waste of waters, seemed indeed to hang by a slender thread; but on he struggled, on he held his way, with great strong strokes that steadily urged him along, and with the steady, untiring movement of a piece of machinery.

Thus an hour passed, and at last the break in the cliff was visible, and a rocky arm running out into the sea, formed a haven of refuge beyond the reef, which, if he could once gain he knew he was safe.

Before him, upon a mass of solid rock Sealands castle was visible, and a mile beyond, glimmering through the park trees, were the white walls of the villa which Ross Vashti had built for himself and his girl bride.

The sight of the castle, where he had been born, and where generations of his name and blood, had first looked on the light of day before him, caused the brow of Brandt Greyhurst to contract sternly, while the distant villa but added renewed strength to his fatigued frame, and he muttered savagely:

"I will not die, no I will not die, for there is much for me to live for."

And on, on he struggled, although the buoyant stroke had gone, and the face had become hard and haggard, and many a man would have yielded to tired nature and sunk beneath the waters as a relief from the strain upon him.

On, and on, until the shadows of night shut out all but the gloomy castle on the point of rocks overhanging the sea, and left him struggling in darkness and dread.

But, as the mariner regards the friendly beacon to guide him on his way, so did Brandt Greyhurst look upon the dark towers and battlements of castle Sealands, outlined against the sky as the light-house to pilot him to a harborage, and though every effort he made was a painful one to him, on he struggled, with the words constantly repeated from his lips:

"I will not die, no, I will not die!"

At last he passed within the reef, and still swimming on, or rather paddling, for his strong strokes had ceased and he swam with only the greatest effort, he at last touched the shore, just as the tide had begun to flow out, and which in a few moments more would have carried him to a grave in the bottom of the sea.

Staggering, hardly able to drag his tired feet after him, he reached a pile of rocks beneath the west end of the castle, and sunk down utterly prostrated, and with the triumphant cry:

"I kept my word; I did not die, I did not die!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE COAST SMUGGLERS.

HARDLY had Brandt Greyhurst sunk down upon the rocks, when a small, rakish-looking cutter appeared in sight, running in toward the cove under reefed sails, and standing on with a hardihood among the rocky reefs, that showed a skillful pilot to be at the helm.

So nearly the hue of the waters were both the vessel and the sails painted, that it would take a keen sailor's eye to discover her at even a short distance away, and no light being visible upon her, it was evident that her object in coming into the cove at midnight was one of secrecy.

Running through the channel in the reefs, the little craft held on her way straight for the bold and lofty cliff upon which stood Sealands Castle.

As she drew near she shortened sail, until only a jib remained, which, as the wind was from the sea, urged her on against the tide with sufficient speed.

To one observing her from the sea, it would look as though the cliff opened and received her, as she disappeared wholly from sight; but to one standing on her bows, there was a narrow chasm that opened into the solid rock, and sufficiently large to conceal from view in any direction a vessel of small tonnage.

As this cave-like chasm was spanned by the castle arch above, there was no place from which a view into the basin could be obtained, excepting one entered it in a boat, and therefore a more secluded retreat could not have been found.

When the Greyhursts dwelt in the castle, the place was called the Wizard's Well, and the servants told stories of its having been the resort of witches and wizards in the long ago, and furthermore said that the waters therein had no bottom to them, and that a boat would be ingulfed if it entered the fearful basin.

And certain it is, to aid in this theory, that a skiff sent in by an elder Greyhurst one day, when the tide was running into the Wizard's Well, was never seen more, and the foaming waters that were hurled back from it in a storm, but added to the weird tales told of it.

The part of the castle that overhung, and was built above this Wizard's Well, had not been inhabited for many years, for, as the Greyhursts became poorer with each generation, the retinue of servants decreased, and only the land rooms, and one wing of the sea structure had been occupied, the balance of the massive old structure being allowed to crumble to decay.

Regardless of the tales told of the old castle, and the fate that, it was said, awaited any craft that went into the Wizard's Well, the little vessel certainly held on until the cliff shut her wholly from view.

But into this weird retreat beneath the very cliff, we will follow her, and the reader will find that the cutter, instead of being dragged down into the lower depths, was moored against a shelf of rock that served as a pier, and back of which was visible a cavern entrance.

It is true that the vessel fretted at her moorings, for the Wizard's Well, from some causes far down in its depths, kept the waters tossing continually, as though it were a caldron of boiling water, and it kept a stout hawser to hold the craft to the rocks, and thick, soft fenders to keep her from dashing in her sides, hung over the edge of the rocky shelf.

Hardly had the strange vessel run into the very side of the cliff, as it seemed, when her decks became alive with men, as a score of stalwart forms came from the cabin, and upon the shelf of rock half a dozen more were visible, coming out of the cave.

"Ho the Scud!"

"Ay, ay, the Wizard's Den!"

The first hail was in a stern voice from the cavern entrance, and the reply came from on board the rakish little vessel, which the next moment glided up to the rock and was made fast by willing hands.

"Good luck, I hope, Captain Reckless," said a tall man who came forward and saluted a person who sprung ashore and confronted him.

"Ay, ay, MacGregor, we have cargoes of wines, laces and silks; what luck with you?" answered the person addressed as Captain Reckless, and who was a dark-faced, stern, yet fine-looking man of thirty, thoroughly armed with sword and pistols, and dressed in a jaunty sailor suit.

"Our luck has been good too, for the cargoes have been safely run in to the Agents," answered MacGregor.

"And the money?"

"I have it safe, captain; but you will have to lay in the basin all day to-morrow!"

"Yes, as the cargo cannot be landed and give me time to run out of sight before dawn; come let us go in and try some of these French wines I have brought, and as soon as the Scud is empty let the men come in and have a jolly time until daylight, and they can sleep to-morrow," and calling to a cabin boy to bring him a case of wine Captain Reckless entered the cabin, followed by MacGregor, bearing a lantern.

The rocky corridor taken by the two men, led them into a large rotunda, for the cavern widened into extensive dimensions, and here were swung hammocks, and set tables and chairs, showing that it was a general living room for the men, while different tunnels led in several directions, both seaward and landward, and with the fresh air blowing through them, the place was by no means an uncomfortable

habitation for men whose lives were in daily peril, and who sought secrecy in all their actions.

Throwing himself upon a ship's sofa, the captain lighted a cigar, and MacGregor took a seat near, and the two entered into conversation regarding what had occurred on land and shore since the last monthly visit of the Scud.

Presently the cabin-boy arrived loaded down with bottles of wine, and one by one the men, as they finished their tasks, dropped in and ere long the cavern hallway rung with the sound of revelry.

But suddenly a hush fell upon all, for a sudden exclamation from one turned every eye upon the cause of it, and there before them they beheld a face and form that did not belong to their smuggler band.

Instantly every man was upon his feet, and every hand was upon a weapon, but there came from the stranger no cry for mercy, and no sign of fear, as he advanced into their midst, and said calmly:

"Hold! gentlemen, I mean you no harm."

"Who are you sir?" cried Captain Reckless sternly:

"Brandt Greyhurst of Sealands."

"Ha! a naval officer, and come here to take us dead or alive, for he is not alone: at him, lads, and cut him down!" cried Captain Reckless.

The men moved forward, but stopped suddenly, for instead of a cry to men they supposed near to come to his aid, he calmly folded his arms, and met their savage glances with a fearless smile, that seemed to dare them to do their worst.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PLEDGE OF A GREYHURST.

THE fearless attitude of Brandt Greyhurst checked the advance upon him of the smugglers, and the pause gave them a chance to observe that he was certainly not a very dangerous personage as he then appeared.

Bootless, hatless, half dressed, with disheveled hair, haggard face, and no arms, he appeared more an object of sympathy than one to be dreaded, and the smugglers looked to their chief, who also, by the light of the lamps, had closely observed the young man, and discovered at a glance that he had not come into their midst to do them harm.

"Hold, men! I see there is a mistake here," he called out to his men, and then turning to the visitor, who like an apparition had come among them, he continued:

"How is it, sir, I find you here?"

"I was riding along the beach to my old home of Sealands, the tide came in and washed me out to sea, and my horse drowning, I swam to the cove, which I barely reached, and fell unconscious on the point of rocks."

"Coming to I came hither, guided by your voices."

The plain story carried truth with it to every one, and yet MacGregor stepped forward and said:

"Had you not heard our voices, Brandt Greyhurst, could you not have come to this rock chamber?"

"Yes."

"Ha! what mean you sir?" cried Captain Reckless; but before Brandt could answer, MacGregor replied:

"I'll speak for him, captain, for it is not the first time I have seen the young man, and there are other old heads here will recall him, although the time I speak of was nine years ago."

"The boy is a Greyhurst as all can tell, by his burning eyes, that ever knew any of his race, and he is the last of the name, if I mistake not, and has nothing left to keep up the dash of his ancestors."

"Nine years ago, before his father died, this boy dwelt with him in the castle above our heads, and the old nurses had filled his brain full of stories of the Wizard's Well, and the old castle being haunted, and left to himself, for the colonel, his father, was overrun with creditors and troubles, he explored every crevice of the old ruin and the waters around it; but sit down, young man, and sip wine while I talk, for you look white and needy; give him a goblet full, captain, for he's worthy of the best."

Brandt Greyhurst bowed his thanks and sunk into a seat, and the captain filled a goblet of champagne and handed it to him.

"Drink it down lad, for it's all the better for having paid no duty, as you know; but, shipmates, as I was telling ye, this lad, then about eleven years old, one day concluded he'd try the Wizard's Well, and you may set me down for a land-lubber if he didn't strip himself on the rocks and jump into the sea at high tide and swim into the basin."

"He made a landing on the rocks and followed the cavern channels to this very spot, and he surprised a party of us here then as he has now."

"Fact, as I'll swear."

"I'll take oath on it too."

"I knows him now."

"He's a man now, but I sees in him the same plucky boy, messmates."

Such were the exclamations from a number of the smugglers, as the scene in the past was recalled to their memories, and, as if having no regret at having met him before, those who remembered him pressed forward and offered their hands, which the young sailor frankly grasped.

"Be easy, lads, until my yarn is spun out, and then we'll touch glasses all round to the youth," said MacGregor, and then, seeing that he had regained the attention of his hearers, he continued:

"Well, lads, we seized that boy in no time, and you all know our laws, of death rather than betrayal, and knives pointed mighty close to his heart, I can tell you; but he didn't scare at all, and there was something in his face that wouldn't let us kill him."

"But the captain—Red Joe was chief, then, Captain Reckless—said the boy must die, and so we set about work to kill him, when up he spoke and said:

"Men, I don't want to die, and yet I am not afraid of death; but I came here only from curiosity, and will not betray you if you will let me go."

"Curiosity killed a cat, and it'll hang us some day if we let you go," said Red Joe to him.

"I will not betray you," again said this lad, and something in his face and manner struck Red Joe, and you all know what a devil he was, and he asked:

"What will prevent you betraying us?"

"My promise not to do so."

"What is that worth?"

"The pledge of a Greyhurst was never broken to friend or foe."

"I tell you, lads, that speech made Red Joe shout right out, and he grasped the hand of the boy and said:

"We'll take that pledge, lad; go back as you came."

"Well, lads, you all know I have lived in this cavern ever since, and you all know the lad kept his word, and I say drink his health and let him go again, for if he gives his word he'll keep it, for I know the race from which he comes."

A wild shout of approval greeted the words of MacGregor, and the mugs and glasses were filled all round, and a bumper was drank to Brandt Greyhurst, whose boyish pledge had been kept through nine long years.

CHAPTER XIII.

A BROKEN PLEDGE.

"I SUPPOSE you understand, Mr. Greyhurst, that your pledge of years ago must be repeated now, or you cannot go hence alive," remarked Captain Reckless calmly, when the men had sought rest, for the day had dawned, and he sat at the table still with Brandt Greyhurst and MacGregor his only companions.

"I know, sir, that this is a band of smugglers—"

"Night Hawks is a better name, sir," interrupted the captain with a slight sneer.

"I know that you break the laws of the land, and my duty would be to arrest you; but I have no such intention, whatever desire I might have, and I frankly give the pledge not to betray you," replied the young sailor.

"As you have shown in the past that your word can be fully relied on, sir, I ask no more: good-night, or rather good-morning, for I see the light stealing in yonder passageway, and I hope to meet you ere your departure, which of course must not be in daylight; now I intend to seek rest," and Captain Reckless left the two together, and for a few moments both MacGregor and the young sailor seemed busy with their own thoughts; then the former said:

"May I ask, Mr. Greyhurst, what has brought you up to Sealands, for if rumor speaks rightly Ross Vashti owns the estate?"

"He does, for he got it by loans he made my father, which could not be met: he lives here now I believe?"

"Not in the castle, sir: he has built a magnificent villa on the hill a mile away, and lives there, for I think he feared to dwell in the old castle, and it is left deserted, to go to ruin."

"Ah me! what a change from the days of my early boyhood; but my forefathers lived too fast, and each son leaving to the other a debt to shoulder, it at last fell upon my father and swamped him, and I am left a beggar; but let us not dwell upon the past, MacGregor, for its memories bring only bitterness."

"You ask me why I am here; I have come to prevent a still greater wrong being done me by Ross Vashti; have you seen the Lady Lois Norman of late?" and Brandt put the question in a tone of indifference he was far from feeling.

"Why don't you know, Master Brandt, that she is now the Lady Ross Vashti?"

An electric shock could not have gone quicker to the heart of Brandt Greyhurst, than did this fatal tidings.

From boyhood he had loved the beautiful little child whose father's impoverished estate joined Sealands, and as she grew to girlhood, and then to the verge of womanhood, his love became almost idolatry.

When ordered to the Americas, nearly two years before, he had told her of his love, although she was scarcely sixteen, and he little

more than a boy in years, and they had pledged eternal love and devotion to each other.

Hearing from her, when in the Indies, that her father wished to force her into a union with a distinguished and wealthy personage, Brandt Greyhurst had determined to return home at once and make her his bride; but the reader knows how Captain Tudor Vashti thwarted that scheme, and his refusing to accept the resignation of the young sailor, the desertion from the ship, and being brought back in irons to England.

Tudor Vashti had also learned of the intended marriage of the Lady Lois, and he knew well the intention of Brandt, for he had heard of their love affair, and aware, through the story of Enoch Shylock, that the maiden was secretly heiress to vast wealth, he had boldly, and without orders, determined to return home and win and wed her.

But the wily Ross Vashti had pushed matters rapidly, and ere the Lance touched English shores, poor Lady Lois was the girl-bride of the wealthy owner of Sealands.

"What! I've hit you hard, lad, for I know you were sweet on the pretty lady yourself; but I thought you knew she was married to the old sinner Vashti, for the gossips, some days ago, were full of it, and could talk of nothing else than the shameful mating of May and December."

"You have hit me hard, MacGregor, but I have been used to hard blows of late," said Brandt, in a low, constrained voice, while his face was livid, his lips hard drawn over his white teeth, and his eyes fairly blazing in their intensity of brightness.

"My poor lad I can feel for you, for twenty years ago a woman's false vows to me sent me to the bad, and made me what now I am; yes, they were married some days ago, and are now at the villa, and the gossips do say that she is heart-broken from some cause, but then her father forced her to it."

"No woman can be forced into a marriage, MacGregor, if she set her heart against it; but it is useless to repine; I came here for one set purpose, and that cannot now be done, but I shall not have made the journey for naught. You frequently leave this den, I believe?"

"I may as well admit it, Master Brandt; there is a tunnel leads from here to the hill that overlooks the valley beyond, and my hut is there, built over the opening, and people call me the Valley Hermit, for I disguise myself as an old man, and go occasionally into the villages and towns, but allow no man to visit my abode, and thus keep my secret."

"In this way I carry to the towns at night, to our agents, the goods we smuggle in, and thus it is I get rid of considerable of the gossip that is cruising round."

"Then you are the very man to aid me, if you will."

"And I will, God knows, for I like you, lad."

"Then rig me up some kind of disguise to visit the villa in, for I wish to see both the Lady Lois and her husband."

"Don't be rash, lad."

"I am not going to be; what I do, shall be done with calmness, I assure you MacGregor; now aid me all in your power, and upon my meeting with those two my future destiny hangs for good or evil."

"I am your friend, lad; come with me," and taking up a lantern, MacGregor, the Smuggler, led the way into a narrow, rocky corridor running directly inland, and with eager step Brandt Greyhurst followed him, muttering to himself, over and over again:

"She pledged me her word to be true and wait, and she has broken it, broken it!"

CHAPTER XIV. THE GIPSY.

A SLENDER, graceful form, clad in a walking suit, cut short, and with a sun hat shading her wealth of gold-brown curls, stopped for rest in a rustic arbor of Sealands Park, that commanded an extensive inland view, and also a vast expanse of water, dotted here and there with sails.

Her hands were filled with wild flowers, gathered in her walk, and humble little specimens of the Floral Kingdom, compared with the choice exotics in the gardens of the villa; but then it would seem that hers was a nature to love the little blossoms hiding away in the woodland.

The face of the fair pedestrian was youthful and lovely, and yet a sad look lingered in the dark blue eyes, and a certain compressing of the lips showed that she was struggling against sorrowful, perhaps bitter thoughts that welled up continually and would not be put down.

As she threw herself languidly upon the rustic seat in the arbor, her eyes turned upon the mass of rocks that rose before her vision not far away, and which were known as old Castle Sealands.

It was a grand structure, even crumbling to ruin as it was, and it held a weird look that made it seem the very place for hobgoblins and spooks to dwell, and no wonder was it, that the country folk were wont to tell strange stories about the old pile.

But the fair beholder of Castle Sealands, as it lay gloomy even in the morning sunlight, did not seem to feel dread of the place, for, her footsteps were wandering in that direction when she halted in the arbor for rest.

As she gazed upon the massive ruin, her eyes filled with tears, and with a sigh and then impatient exclamation and gesture, she turned her glance upon the distant villa, the lordly home of Ross Vashti.

But again the impatient exclamation arose to her lips, and she bent her gaze upon the sea, which was tinted with the sunlight, and beautiful in its quietude, for only a light breeze ruffled its surface.

As if calmed by its motionless bosom, she remained quietly gazing upon the sea, utterly oblivious of the present, it seemed, until suddenly recalled to herself by hearing a step near her.

Starting, she turned, and beheld the bent form of an old man, for his beard and hair were white, and his dark face seemed furrowed with lines the passing years had made there.

At first she was slightly startled, for the orders of the owner of Sealands were severe, regarding allowing any one other than those who held the right, in the grounds of the estate, and she had not expected to see any one during her walk, and, wishing to be alone, had bade her attendant to remain at the villa.

But the white, bowed head reassured her, although the strange dress told her that she stood in the presence of one of the wandering children of the woodland—a Gipsy.

"My good man, if you are hungry and need food, or wish a few pieces of silver, if you will go to the villa yonder, you shall be cared for," she said, kindly.

"Lady, I want not your gold, for I am not in need, and my heart only is ahungered," was the calm reply.

"Are your people near?" she asked, with some show of anxiety, not liking the manner and tone of the old man.

"No; I have no people; I am a wanderer alone over the green earth, and I am the last of my race," was the sad reply, in a quivering voice.

"Poor man; you are getting too old to wander about as you do, and should have some home, some shelter with kind friends to care for you; if you will go to the Country House, I will have my coachman take you there, and give you a letter that will gain you admission."

"I am one who neither asks, or receives favors, lady; I am a reader of the stars, of signs, faces and hearts, and can tell you the future, which to you is as a hidden book, but to me is as clear as crystal; would have me read thy fortune, lady?"

"Ah! my fortune is but misfortune; my fate is sealed forever," she said, sadly.

"Let me see thy fair hand, lady," he asked, politely.

Withdrawing the thread glove she wore, she unhesitatingly extended her hand to him, and taking it in his own, which trembled slightly, he said:

"Ah, lady, I see the lines of joy, ambition and heartlessness strongly marked here."

She quickly withdrew her hand, while her face flushed, and he said pleadingly:

"Do not be angry, lady, but listen, for I would trace out thy destiny, so that thou mayst know which way thy tiny feet will tend through life."

"Thank you, lady: now I see that thy earlier days held forth promise of happiness to thee, and love was thy mate from girlhood to womanhood; but here, dark lines are traceable, and it seems as though pledges made were broken, promises given were unfulfilled, and gold and position won thy heart from one who loved thee."

"You shall not talk thus to me, sir," and the hand was drawn suddenly away.

"So it seemed, lady, to my reading, and there is an old saying that truth only offends; but I meant to read in thy small hand only the truth; wilt let me see thy hand again?"

Hesitatingly she held it forth, and he went on in the same low, quivering words in which he had before spoken:

"There is a break here, I note; it is the broken pledge of which I spoke, and, as the lines of thy destiny run, better had it been true love and a humble home, than gilded misery in a palace, for dark shadows creep in here, and the pledge broken turned the heart that loved thee to gall; see, he becomes a wanderer, for here the lines branch off, and what evil he may do, he will lay at thy door."

"This is cruel, and loving me he dare not do it, for he would know his charge against me to be unjust!" she said, quickly, and speaking more to herself, than to the Gipsy.

"The lines say that you broke the pledge, lady, and what sorrow it gives him, he will lay at thy door; see, the future looks misty here on thy palm, but I can read no joy for thee in the future, and here comes a crimson flush on the hand, that tells of dark deeds yet to come."

"I will bear no more, Gipsy, for thy art is feigned, and I believe not in thy predictions," she said, angrily.

"But the past, and the broken pledge, lady," persisted the fortune-teller.

"I admit it not."

"Thou wilt not deny it, for here, on this finger where now glitters a diamond, rested a ruby, a blood-red stone, and it has been cast aside, and—"

"Hold! do you know me?"

"Thou art the lady of yonder lordly house I take it."

"Yes; and my name?"

"Is different from the one thy heart once chose to bear."

"Enough! if you need food go to the villa; if you wish gold come, and I will give it you, for I have not my purse with me; but I will hear no more, old man, for thy croakings have already added to my sorrows; farewell," and Lady Lois Vashti turned away, and the old Gipsy was alone.

CHAPTER XV.

A REWARD.

A MAN, attired in the dress of a regular countryman, wearing heavy boots, and carrying a stout cane was walking slowly along the highway that cut in two parts the vast landed estate of Sealands, a few hours after the interview between the Lady Lois Vashti and the old Gipsy fortune-teller.

Presently he came to where a massive gateway led to Castle Sealands, visible half a mile away, and into this he was turning, when his eyes caught sight of a placard fastened upon one of the stone posts.

Instantly he stopped and read aloud, and in a voice one would not have suspected from one of his appearance:

"IN THE KING'S NAME!

"TAKE NOTICE ALL LOYAL SUBJECTS!

"Whereas, one of the officers of the Royal Navy, to wit, Midshipman Brandt Greyhurst, formerly of Castle Sealands, has willfully deserted the service of his King, while on duty in foreign seas, is now a fugitive, having made his escape from the Tower, be it known that he is hereby denounced as

A DESERTER AND FELON,

deserving of death, and a reward of

ONE THOUSAND POUNDS

will be given for the return of the said Brandt Greyhurst, dead or alive, to the King's Yacht Lance, anchored off London Tower.

"By order of His Majesty, the King.

"TUDOR VASHTI,
"Captain Royal Navy and Commander of the King's Yacht Lance."

Thrice did the countryman read over the placard, and then, after glancing cautiously up and down the road, he tore it carefully down, folded it up, and walked rapidly on to the castle and disappeared in one of its entrances.

For a few moments he remained unseen, and then he reappeared in the sea tower, and leaning against the turreted wall, carefully read over again aloud the reward.

"By Heaven! this is the work of Tudor Vashti," he muttered, and after an instant of silence he continued:

"This last stroke throws to the wind all good resolves; a deserter and a felon, deserving death, and with a reward offered for his body, dead or alive, has no right to raise his head among honorable men, and no power to prove his innocence of the charge against him."

"Ha! who comes there?"

Bending his eyes upon the park, a long way off he saw a man approaching, and, after a while he cried:

"By the cross! it is Ross Vashti, and he comes this way."

Quickly he turned and descended from the tower, and taking a large hall leading from the center of the castle, wended his way to the old wing overhanging the sea, and the Wizard's Well.

In the middle of a small stone chamber was an ancient altar, for the Greyhursts had been good Catholics, and upon this he lightly sprang.

Instantly the altar moved slowly from its place, revealing an opening beneath, and stone stairs leading down into the depths below.

Standing on the third step, the altar began to slowly return to its place once more, and the secret opening was again securely closed, leaving the rock chamber as before.

Half an hour, perhaps, passed away, and once more the heavy stone altar turned on its hidden hinges, and in the open trap appeared a form that was certainly terrible to look upon, for in the uncertain twilight, an unbeliever even would be pardoned for believing it to be Satan himself.

And that same diabolical form the reader beheld in the opening scenes of this story, when Ross Vashti met face to face in the tower, one who claimed to be Satan himself, and to whom he sold his soul when after the lapse of years he should be called on to give it up, or that which should be demanded of him in its stead.

When Ross Vashti fled from the ruin, and homeward, amid the rolling of thunder and flashes of vivid lightning, that broke from a storm sweeping suddenly up over land and sea, he who called himself Satan, had returned to the chapel wing, and once more disappeared in the dark depths beneath the stone altar.

CHAPTER XVI.

CAPTAIN RECKLESS CAPTURES A PRIZE.

"WELL, my lad, you have been rigging yourself out in as many of those old costumes I showed you as a ship has sails," said MacGregor, as Brandt Greyhurst entered the social hall of the smugglers, in their cavern under the castle.

It was the second night of his stay among the outlaws, and all the day he had been busy, so that MacGregor had not seen him after the two had parted in the early morning.

"Yes, and they have served me well, for if I have not put a thorn in one person's side, and made another believe that Satan walks the earth, then am I greatly mistaken; but tell me, has Captain Reckless sailed yet?"

"No, he goes to-night, but he is off with the men on a little expedition he seems to think will bring him in considerable profit, though I do not approve of these land raids."

"I hope the villa is not his destination," said Brandt Greyhurst quickly.

"It is to get possession of some old land-owner who will pay well for his release; but have you decided yet what you are to do?"

"Yes, turn smuggler, pirate, or anything else that is evil," said the young sailor bitterly.

"No, no, Master Brandt, the likes of you never should turn from honor's path," said MacGregor earnestly.

"Bah! don't preach to me, man, of honor, for look how the innocent suffer, while the guilty hold high their heads," and the young sailor handed the smuggler the placard, which, in his disguise of a countryman, he had torn from the gate-post leading to the Castle Sealands.

In surprise the smuggler read it through, and said excitedly:

"But this cannot be true."

"No, it is false, for I asked leave to come back to England, and it being refused, I handed in my resignation, and it being also declined, I secretly left the vessel by swimming, to reach the ship that was to sail that night for England; but I was too late, was picked up and brought here in irons, and the man who did me this wrong was Captain Tudor Vashti, the son of the man who robbed me of my just inheritance."

"But you see I dare not show myself to my fellow-men, or the reward would set them like blood-hounds upon me, and unable to prove my innocence, and branded with the names of deserter and felon, do you wonder that I say I intend to turn smuggler, for in the exciting life I will lead, I can drown thought, and perhaps it will lead the way to an end I have in view, for, MacGregor, he who wrongs a Greyhurst had better not been born."

Brandt had spoken almost wildly, and his words drew the deepest sympathy from the heart of the smuggler, who said:

"Well, my lad, I feel for you, as you know, and cannot say what is best for you to do; but it seems a shame that one of your name should be branded of a crime and a shadow put upon your life when it is in you to make a reputation that would cause England to be proud of you."

"It is in me to make a devil as well; had the world treated me well, I had hopes of winning a name for myself; but it has branded me with infamy, and now I am what I am; ha! do you not hear voices?"

"Yes; Captain Reckless is returning, and if you wish to go with him there will be no trouble about it; in fact, he needs a second in command, for the boys are hard to manage, and none of them fit for the duty devolving upon an officer."

"I thank you, MacGregor," answered Brandt, fervently, and as he spoke Captain Reckless and his men entered the assembly hall, and the chief cried, exultantly:

"Well, Mac, we did not get the old man, for he was ill, they said; but we just kidnapped that sweet young wife of his, and my life for it, he will pay a cool ten thousand pounds to get her back, so we are in luck."

"Oh, captain, you did not kidnap the Lady Lois, I hope?" cried MacGregor, anxiously, at the same time glancing toward Brandt Greyhurst.

"Indeed I did, and she is now a prisoner in the Scud's cabin, and we sail within half an hour, although it is a nasty night out."

With a bound Brandt Greyhurst confronted the smuggler captain, and his hand dropped heavily upon his shoulder, as he said, in a voice hoarse from suppressed passion:

"Did I understand you aright, sir, that you had taken the Lady Lois Vashti from her home to-night, and now hold her in your power on your vessel?"

"So I have done, sir, and how does it concern you?" was the angry reply, for the captain liked not the heavy hand upon his shoulder.

In dead earnest came the answer, and in tones as clear as the tone of a bell:

"Then, sir, you shall place that lady under the protection of MacGregor, to return at once to her home, or you shall die by my hand."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CHALLENGE.

The calm, determined words of Brandt Greyhurst caused a decided sensation, and every

smuggler who had seated himself at the table for a parting glass of wine, was on his feet in an instant, while Captain Reckless, in spite of his dashing courage, which had gained for him the name he bore, seemed almost stunned by the attitude and words of the young sailor.

But he quickly recovered his cool, sneering manner and asked:

"May I ask what the lady is to you?"

"That is none of your business, sir; you have heard my words, and one or the other shall be the alternative," was the fearless reply.

"Does it not strike you that there might be another alternative?"

"Name it, sir."

"That I might kill you," was the sneering retort.

"That alternative I am willing to contest with you whenever you say that you will not place the Lady Lois in the keeping of MacGregor here."

"Bah! he would do my bidding."

"You mistake me there, captain, if it is to harm a woman, or even to keep her in durance vile to extort money for her ransom," said MacGregor, boldly.

"Ha! this looks like mutiny, and led by one whose life we spared, on his word alone. I am chief here, MacGregor, and as such I will be obeyed."

"And you shall be, Captain Reckless, in all things that tend to the interest of the band, but not when you war on women."

"By Heaven! I will teach you a lesson, dog of a mutineer," and Captain Reckless stepped toward MacGregor, his sword in hand.

But quickly Brandt Greyhurst sprung before him, and seizing the blade, said, calmly:

"This quarrel, sir, is between you and I, not with MacGregor."

"I'll settle you anon, sir."

"You will settle with me now."

"Release my sword!"

"Only on condition that you cross blades with me, and may the best man win," was the fearless reply.

"By the king! but I have half a humor to oblige you, though I could have you quartered and thrown into the sea."

"Therein you would act the coward, for I am a defenseless man in your midst; but I have that confidence in the gallant men I see around me to feel that they will see fair play, and if their captain refuses to meet me, will be convinced that he is what I believe him to be."

"And that is?" sneered the smuggler chief.

"A coward!"

"Curses on you! I'll meet you, sir, in any way you please, Brandt Greyhurst," cried the captain, stung to madness by the insult.

"Very well, and we fight for life and death, and the instant release of the Lady Lois."

"Yes."

"And your men, if you fall will allow her to depart in safety?"

"That rests with the men."

"What say you, lads; is the lady to go free if I defeat your captain?"

A number of voices replied in the affirmative; but there were some grumblers, and one answered:

"You see, sir, we would get a big ransom for her."

"Yes, the old man would pay well," added another.

"She'd be worth more to us than a year's cruise," remarked a third, and seeing that the avariciousness of the men would defeat him, even if he was victor over Captain Reckless, Brandt said:

"Well, my men, I will pay you the ransom; call the amount fifty pounds to each man in the King's gold."

"Done, sir; but where is the gold?"

"I will pay you ere I take the lady from your keeping."

Even MacGregor looked at the young sailor in intense surprise, for where was he to get such a sum from? and Captain Reckless said in his scornful way:

"Men, he has not a shilling to pray his soul out of perdition."

"Lads, your captain lies; I pledge you my word to pay you the amount within the hour."

"Enough, if Master Greyhurst promises it," cried a voice, and a general assent being given, Brandt turned to MacGregor and asked:

"Will you lend me a sword to cross with the captain?"

"Certainly, my lad; but you'd better drop this matter," said MacGregor, and he added in a low whisper:

"Reckless is a very devil with the blade."

"And so am I," was the cool reply, as Brandt Greyhurst took a blade handed him by MacGregor, and tried its temper on the rocky floor.

"Worthy of the King's scabbard, MacGregor," he said lightly, and turning to Captain Reckless, he continued:

"Now, sir, I am wholly at your service, though I wish you would think better of it, restore the Lady Lois to her home, let our quarrel end here, and take me along with you on your vessel."

"A Greyhurst a smuggler?" was the sarcastic retort.

"I am what circumstances made me, sir; but as you seem disinclined to follow my suggestion, let us cross blades at once."

"Willingly," and throwing aside his coat and hat, Captain Reckless drew his weapon, measured its length with the sword in the hand of Brandt Greyhurst, and said in a bitter, insolent way:

"Now, sir, to gain my reward, for I noticed to-night that there is a thousand pounds offered for you dead or alive."

"Then suppose you earn the blood money," cried Brandt Greyhurst, his face flushing, and he at once advanced upon the smuggler captain, and with a clash that made the rocky cavern and its halls ring again, the two blades met together in a vicious, determined stroke that showed plainly that both men were in deadly earnest.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DUEL IN THE CAVERN.

The career of Captain Reckless, the smuggler chief, had been a strange one, according to the yarn spun by one of the seamen of the Scud, who claimed to have known him in his boyhood.

The old tar, for the yarn-spinner was an old man, had told his messmates that the captain was an Isle of Wight boy, born of a family of good name and wealth, whose father dying left him a fair inheritance under the control of his mother; but the widow had married again, and the boy had found a hard master in his step-father, and had one day bidden farewell to home and kindred and gone to sea.

Rumor had it that he had gone to the Americas, and had there set up in business in some Atlantic seaport; but he came back in a few years a very rich man, squandered his money in fast living in London, fought a duel that was fatal to his adversary, and had to fly to escape trouble, as the one he killed was a king's officer.

Several years more passed away and his mother died, and he came back to claim his estate, but found that his step-father had run through with it, and he revenged himself upon him by killing him, and again taking to the sea.

The next the old tar heard of him was on the deck of the Scud, which boarded a French vessel, on which he was a seaman, and received the goods to be smuggled into England.

Making himself known to him the captain had instantly asked him to go with him, and thus it was that the old sea-dog had become a smuggler under one who was an infant in arms when he was a man grown.

MacGregor said of Captain Reckless that he had been with the band several years, and had been picked up by Red Joe, their former chief, and had been his *protege*, and by his pluck and sea skill, had been chosen chief.

All united in saying he was a desperate man when aroused, as brave as a lion, and the best hand with a blade any of the band had ever seen handle one.

It was on this account particularly, that MacGregor had desired to prevent a hostile meeting with Brandt Greyhurst; but that young man had yet to meet any one whom he could be made to fear, and was determined to meet Captain Reckless on his own terms.

Ere half a dozen passes had been exchanged between them, the smuggler chief's confident smile faded from his face, for he had expected to instantly disarm the youth, trusting in his own prowess and strength; but he felt convinced that he had met a master of the weapon, and a few skillful parries and dangerous thrusts, caused him to be on his guard against his foe.

As for Brandt Greyhurst, he well knew his own prowess, and wishing to end the matter at once, and free the Lady Lois from the deep anxiety she must necessarily suffer, he pressed the fighting from the first, and becoming warmed to the work soon showed the crowd of interested smugglers that their captain had all he could do to defend his life.

Surprised at the skill and strength of the young sailor, never having met his match even before, Captain Reckless seemed to fight with less nerve than in previous combats, and it was but a few moments before he stood at bay, his back against the rock wall of the cabin, and his every energy devoted to protecting himself.

But Brandt Greyhurst seemed bent only on the task he had set out for himself to accomplish, and with set lips and stern brow, pressed his adversary harder and harder, until at last he got in under the guard of the smuggler chief and drove his sword deep into his side.

The cry of rage and pain commingled, that broke from the lips of Captain Reckless, was drowned in the cries that issued from the band, as their chief sunk down in his tracks.

"Great God! you have killed him!" cried MacGregor, springing to the side of the wounded man.

The eyes opened, the lips quivered, and then in firm, stern accents came the words:

"Not yet; I shall live to see you die, Brandt Greyhurst."

Paying no heed to the remark of the man all believed dying, and who was at once borne to a

cot in one of the inner recesses of the cavern, Brandt Greyhurst said quietly:

"Lads, I will bring you the gold here within a few moments."

Retreating into one of the tunnel-like hallways he disappeared, while the men eagerly discussed the duel, and commented upon the result; but their conversation was ere long interrupted by the return to their midst of the young sailor, bearing in his hands a leather bag heavy with gold, as was shown when he poured the contents upon the table.

Forgetting their wounded chief, at the sight of the shining metal, the crew gathered around the table, and one by one they received from the young sailor the amount he had promised them.

"This looks like old gold, lad," said one, examining closely a gold-piece he held in his hand.

Brandt Greyhurst smiled grimly and replied: "It is, and is not much worn, as it has been idle for a century; now, lads, I have paid the ransom of the Lady Lois, and I suppose that I will have no more trouble."

Over the crowd he cast his burning eyes, and his glance seemed to fall upon every face, and to a man the answer came:

"No!"

"I am glad of it; ha! MacGregor, how is the chief?" and he turned to the smuggler officer, who just then entered.

"He is alive, and conscious, but I think will die."

"So be it; he brought it upon himself; but come with me, for I have a duty for you to perform."

"Ay, ay, lad, and it will not be an unpleasant one, I can swear, as I know that the fair lady goes free."

"She does: I have paid her ransom."

"The devil you did! with what?"

"Gold."

"No! where did you get it, lad?"

"That is my affair, MacGregor; but come."

"Hold on, Messmate Mac, but are we to sail now the captain's done for?" asked the boatswain of the Scud, coming forward.

"I know not what to say, Miller," answered MacGregor, in an anxious tone.

"Then permit me to decide; yes, you sail within the hour, and I go as your chief."

Every eye fell upon the speaker in utter amazement.

It was Brandt Greyhurst that spoke, and calm and smiling he stood before the two-score men, watching the effect of his startling declaration.

"Does any man dispute my claim?" he said after an instant of dead silence.

"Not I for one; there is none better to serve under, if you choose to brand yourself as an outlaw," said MacGregor.

"In the king's name I have been branded as such, and I cast my fortunes with you, lads; having taken from you your captain, it is but right that I supply you with another, and therefore I say that I will take the Scud on her cruise; who says nay?"

A wild shout burst from the group of reckless men, and MacGregor said earnestly:

"By the cross! lad, you are the captain of the coast smugglers."

"So be it: I but follow my destiny, lead me where it may," was the stern, unrelenting reply.

CHAPTER XIX.

A MYSTERY TO LADY LOIS.

THOUGH the waves ran high without the Scud lay safely moored in the cushioned dock of the Wizard's Well, and was ready to drop out with the tide running seaward, and once more face the dangers of the precarious calling her crew led.

In the small, but comfortable cabin, sat a fair form on an easy-chair, her face buried in her hands, and the long trail of her evening dress lying in folds around her.

Presently she looked up, and the face of Lady Lois Vashti was revealed in all its beauty, though now upon it rested a scared expression, for, dragged from the luxurious little tea-room, where she sat alone, her head muffled, and borne to a vessel by whom, and for what purpose she knew not, it was no wonder that terror seized upon her heart.

Presently there came a heavy step on deck, and the next instant a tall form entered the cabin.

"Well, sir, who and what are you, and why have I been brought hither?" cried Lady Lois, and her indignation shone in her eyes and look.

It was MacGregor the Smuggler who stood before her, and doffing his hat, he returned politely:

"Lady, by no desire of mine were you brought here, I assure you, and I have come to bear you back to your home."

"Ah! then you are not one of the outlaws, for as they brought me here, I heard enough to convince me that I was in the power of pirates?"

"Alas! lady, I am an outlaw; but though I commit acts of outlawry for gold, or excitement perhaps would be a better reason, I am not one to believe in warring against women."

"Then you will set me free?" said the woman eagerly.

"Yes, I think so."

"Then you shall be well paid, I pledge you."

"I act not for gold now, lady, but at the request of one other."

"And that other?"

"I am forbidden to tell; like me he has the brand upon him, but to save you to-night, he boldly faced the entire band, fought the chief, and mortally wounded him, and himself paid your ransom, and by his command I am now here to release you."

"And who is this man?"

"I said I was forbidden to say."

"And he knows me?"

"He does."

"It cannot be, for men of his class I have never met," said the lady with sarcasm.

"Ah, Lady Lois of Sealands, I have seen just such beautiful women as you are, drive men to outlawry with false smiles and pledges as fickle as the wind."

The woman started and turned pale, for somehow the shot went home to her; but she said coldly:

"We will not discuss the matter, sir; whoever this brave defender of mine is, I thank him from my heart, and I shall repay him, if he will only tell me how I can do so."

"Lady, do not add insult to injury by offering him gold."

"And I have injured him?" she asked in surprise.

"It may be; but let us drop the subject, and allow me to ask if you are willing to make a pledge if you go hence?"

"How mean you?"

"You are aware that you are in the power of outlaws?"

"Yes."

"You also doubtless know that this yacht lies within a short distance of your husband's villa?"

"Yes."

"The haunt of smugglers on this coast has not been hitherto suspected?"

"No."

"We wish the secret to remain a secret."

"And expect me to pledge myself not to betray you?"

"Yes, lady."

"Thereby making me a party to your evil deeds?"

"No, simply forget the circumstances of to-night's happening."

"I cannot."

"No one saw you taken from your home, as I understand it?"

"No, or an alarm would have been given."

"Your husband, not yourself, was the intended victim; but when our captain called at the villa and asked to see him, he was told he was confined to his room ill, and would see no one, and you were then discovered in a wing of the building, and calling several of his men he seized you."

"And the affair will be repeated if I give the pledge?"

"Not so, lady, for I give my pledge you shall not be disturbed again."

"And my husband?"

"The same pledge I give regarding Mr. Vashti."

"You are an outlaw?"

The face of MacGregor flushed at the sarcasm and meaning of the remark; but he answered:

"Yes, a self-confessed one."

"And you expect me to take your word?"

"Yes, lady, for if I meant you harm, if it was to get gold from you we now held you, you would not be allowed to go without the payment of one dollar."

"True; but you said there was one who had paid my ransom?"

"Yes."

"And who he is you refuse to divulge?"

"Yes, lady, at his demand."

"He holds me in high esteem," and again the sarcasm of her tone was marked.

"Whatever he may have to forgive for the past, Lady Vashti, he has not forgotten his honor," was the prompt rebuke, and she felt it, for she said quickly, while the color rose in her face:

"I was wrong to speak unkindly of one who had so befriended me; what is the pledge you ask?"

"Our law is, Lady Lois, that a traitor to our band, or any one finding out the secret of our retreat, must die instantly, and it has been cruelly kept, with one exception, and that one is the very man who befriends you, for his pledge was taken, and yours will be."

"Strange that we should be in circumstances so similar but the pledge?"

"That, upon your honor, you swear not to divulge by word, or act, the secret of the smugglers of the coast?"

"If I break my pledge?"

"Then woe be unto you, Lady Lois."

She started at the deeply impressive words and manner of MacGregor, and wishing to end a scene that was most painful to her; she said firmly:

"Upon my honor I give the pledge."

"Enough! come, lady."

He led her from the cabin, having thrown a cloak around her, the one which Captain Reckless had used to muffle her head in, and with curiosity she gazed around, as she stepped out upon the shelf of rock.

Into the cavern he led her, until they came to the dimly lighted social hall, and she saw around her a number of men, standing grim and silent in the background.

Presently there came the stern command:

"Halt!"

"Ay, ay," replied MacGregor, coming to a standstill, and holding Lady Lois by the arm, for he saw that she was deeply moved.

"Has the pledge been given?" asked the same stern voice.

"Yes."

"Let it be repeated here."

"Repeat the pledge, Lady," said MacGregor, and in a voice that at first quivered, but then grew firm she said, so that all could hear:

"Upon my honor I give the pledge not to betray the secret I have this night discovered."

"Woe be unto thee and thine if that pledge be broken, Lady Lois Vashti, of Sealands, for the ends of the earth are not far enough to fly to, to escape our wrath that will follow you," said the stern voice back in the gloom.

"Come," whispered MacGregor, and the two moved forward once more, followed one of the dimly-lighted passageways, until, after quite a long walk, they came out into the cabin known as the Old Hermit's.

A path led them along then in the direction of the villa, which they at last came in sight of.

Lights still burned brightly in the windows, and it was evident that Lady Lois had not been missed, or if missed, her absence had caused no alarm, as she was supposed to be in some part of the extensive mansion.

The wind still howled dismally, and the roar of the storm-lashed sea was distinctly heard, as wet, bedraggled with mud, and worn out, Lady Lois halted with MacGregor in the shadow of the piazza.

"Here I leave you, lady."

"I thank you for your kindness to me, and beg that you allow me to send you a reward."

"No, lady; not for doing my duty."

"Then to the one for whom you act, and whose name you will not betray, give this, and say that Lady Lois Vashti pledges herself to serve him should he ever need her aid, when he returns to her this ring and asks such favor of her."

As she spoke Lady Lois drew from her slender finger a massive gold ring, shaped and carved in a most peculiar manner, for the top was shaped as an eye, with a large, glowing opal for the ball, and so exquisitely surrounded and inlaid with onyx and pearl, that it seemed almost as if it were real, and when turned upon MacGregor the orb of fire seemed to look him through.

"It is an heirloom in our family, and I give it freely as a souvenir to my unknown friend, outlaw though he be. Good-night."

She glided away, and having watched her disappear in the massive doorway, MacGregor returned to the Wizard's Well, and found all the crew gathered upon the Scud, and Brandt Greyhurst pacing silently to and fro in the passageway.

"Well?"

"She is safe, and they seemed not to know of her absence; she sent you this ring to wear, and gave the pledge to serve you, should you ever need her aid, when you sent and asked it in the name of this opal eye."

"And she does not know me?"

"No; nor suspect."

"I thank you; now let me tell you, MacGregor, this cavern holds a secret which you do not know, for to-day I found buried here a treasure-box, hidden by my great-great-grandfather, and it was from this that I paid the ransom of the Lady Lois to-night: your kindness to me I can never forget, and should luck go against us, I have in this cavern, still concealed, gold enough to keep you and me from want."

"Now I am launched upon the sea of destiny, and I shall go whithersoever the wind listeth; farewell!"

He wrung the hand of MacGregor, sprung on board the Scud, gave the orders to cast loose, and ten minutes after the fleet craft was flying off to sea under close reefed sails, and Brandt Greyhurst controlled her destiny for good or evil.

CHAPTER XX.

A MISTAKE

LEAVING the Scud and her reckless young captain to struggle with the storm for the present, I will return to Tudor Vashti, who had given his boatmen orders to pull for the yacht, in a tone that caused them to see that their commander was in no mood to trifle with.

As the cutter was passing the Tower stairs, Tudor Vashti suddenly seized the tiller from the hand of the coxswain, and headed directly for them.

Springing out on the stone steps, he was confronted by the sentinel on duty who leveled a bayonet at his heart and said decidedly:

"Halt!"

"I would see Sir Charles Friedland, the commandante."

"It is after hours, sir," replied the sentinel, politely saluting, for he saw that he addressed an officer of high rank.

"It matters not what the hour is; I have prisoners for his dungeons, and news to communicate; send him word that Captain Tudor Vashti, of the king's yacht, asks an interview."

The sentinel gave a signal and a sergeant approached and bore the message, and soon returned with the request that he was to follow him to Sir Charles's quarters.

"Coxswain, if those three men escape, I shall ornament the yard-arm with you," he said, savagely, to the coxswain of the cutter, and then followed the commandante within the gloomy walls.

In a pleasant—if a spot in such a gloomy pile could be so termed—wing of the Tower was a suite of rooms occupied by Sir Charles Friedland, the commandante of the Tower, and he was seated at a table writing when the young captain entered.

A pleasant-faced man, in spite of the misery he held in his hands in the control of the prison, he looked up, and then arose with a smile of welcome as Tudor Vashti entered.

"Ah, captain, glad to see you back from across the waters; but knew not you were expected; you are welcome."

"Nor was I, Sir Charles, as I took the bit in my teeth and ran home against orders; but I suppose I can make it all right with the king under the circumstances; but you received a prisoner from me?"

"Yes, poor Brandt Greyhurst, who it seems has gotten himself into trouble, and deeply I regret it, for he is the last of his race, and comes of a stock than which there are none better in the kingdom; how was it?"

"He wished to return to England, and I refused, for my crew are mutinous, and I could spare no officer, and he very coolly deserted."

"Strange, indeed! I would not have believed it but from your lips; but it will go hard with him, as death without trial will be his doom."

"Yes, when he is taken."

"Taken! what mean you, captain?"

"When we capture him."

"Why, I already have him in a dungeon of the Tower."

"You are sure?"

"Quite sure; he was brought before me, numbered, ironed, and sent to cell 13."

"You are mistaken, Sir Charles."

"Impossible!"

"And yet I just met him in the streets of London perfectly free, and in attempting to capture him, was knocked down and he escaped."

"Captain Tudor Vashti, the man who enters this Tower as a prisoner can never escape, sir; you were mistaken in the man."

"On the contrary, Sir Charles Friedland, you were mistaken in the man."

"It can be proven, sir."

"Then order the occupant of cell No. 13 here."

"I will," and stepping to the door, Sir Charles gave an order to a sentinel on duty, and in ten minutes there was heard the clanking of chains, and a prisoner entered, with bowed head, and in uniform, but with the insignia of rank torn from his shoulder.

"Ask the guard to retire, Sir Charles," suggested Tudor Vashti, as the latter was about to speak.

The commandante did so, and when alone with the prisoner, Sir Charles said sternly:

"Now, Captain Vashti, which is right, you or I?"

"Let the prisoner answer, sir."

Instantly the bowed head was raised, and the prisoner advanced into the light, and Sir Charles, after one long look started back with the cry:

"Great God! Holbrook, my son!"

"Yes, father, I am your son," was the firm reply.

"And in chains? You then were the deserter that disgraced himself, and—"

"Hold! father, I am no deserter, as Captain Vashti will tell you; but Brandt Greyhurst was my friend; he saved my life at Cowes, as you know, several years ago, and, begging my commander's pardon, not believing him intentionally a deserter, and wishing to save him from the death I knew would follow if he came here, I took advantage of our strange likeness to each other, and of your position as Tower keeper, and passed for him and went to the dungeon, intending to send for you in the morning and confess all."

"Holbrook, you have placed me in a most awkward situation, and yourself in a dangerous one," said Sir Charles in a perplexed way.

"The risk I willingly face, sir; but I regret trouble to you, though think it can be avoided."

"How?"

"Captain Vashti, Brandt, you and I alone know the deception practiced, sir, and I can return on the yacht, and nothing need be said of

it," was the bold suggestion of the handsome young reefer.

Sir Charles glanced furtively at Captain Vashti, who paced the room several times in silence, as was his wont when deeply moved; but at last he said:

"Sir Charles, I have no desire to cause you trouble, and I can but praise the act of your son in wishing to serve one whom he called his friend, and who had saved his life; but Midshipman Friedland must be most careful how he sets my authority at naught again."

"I thank you, Captain Tudor, for your kindness to both Holbrook and myself, and hope to some day prove that in some way I can serve you," and Sir Charles held forth his hand, which Tudor Vashti warmly grasped, while Holbrook Friedland said:

"And I too owe you thanks, Captain Vashti; but under existing circumstances, it would be best for me to return in irons to the yacht, and in the morning it will be believed that Greyhurst made his escape, and nothing will be thought of it."

"A good idea; now, Sir Charles, I have three deserters in my boat to turn over to your keeping, until they are executed; I will have my lieutenant make out charges against them, and send them to you to-morrow, for to-night they attacked me in the streets, and had it not been for a passing citizen, would have killed me."

"Indeed! they shall be most severely dealt with; they are in your boat, you say?"

"Yes, at the Tower stairs."

Sir Charles touched a bell, and the same sergeant appeared.

"Lead this prisoner to the boat at the Tower stairs, and leave him with the officer; then take charge of three prisoners there and carry them to the death-cells."

The sergeant saluted and retired, and after a glass of wine with Sir Charles, Tudor Vashti took his leave, and half an hour after was in his cabin pacing to and fro, while the daring young midshipman who so cleverly had saved Brandt Greyhurst, had left his irons in the state-room of his friend, and quietly crept off to his own quarters, where he was congratulating himself upon the happy termination of what seemed at one time to be a very gloomy picture for all concerned.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE KING AND HIS VISITOR.

THE scene now changes to an apartment in the St. James Palace, which was used by England's monarch as both library and private audience chamber.

Upon the morning following the scene at the Tower, the king sat in a velvet-covered chair, elaborately carved, sipping a cup of coffee, which he poured from a silver urn that stood on a table at his left hand, while upon his right was an escritoire, covered with writing materials, letters, official documents and papers.

The chamber was hung with tapestry of exquisite patterns, the colors remaining rich and brilliant, though it was centuries old, and around the room were massive pieces of furniture of the Elizabethan age.

A few portraits of the German ancestors of the king hung on the walls, a superb silver candelabra in the shape of a stag's antlers, and a jewel-hilted sword lying on the mantle, were the only other objects of interest to attract the eye of the visitor.

As the king sipped his coffee, which he had himself poured into a tiny China cup, his brow was clouded, and it was evident that something had gone amiss with him.

He was a man of commanding appearance, and about him was an air of dignity and power that at once proclaimed him a monarch.

"Well, I see I must curb that boy, or he will give me trouble," he muttered, setting down his cup, and taking up an official dispatch received the evening before.

"The Lance anchored near the Tower, and I believing her in the Indies: why what can the boy mean?"

"Has he had an action with the enemy, captured a pirate's nest, or done anything that has caused his return without orders?"

"I hope so, though I fear not, as he would have at once come to report his triumphs."

"I sent him away for a long cruise, hoping to save him from the dissipation he had entered upon here, and now I find him back again and—what is it, sirrah?" and the king turned angrily to a liveried servant, who just then entered and broke in upon his musings.

"Captain Tudor Vashti, your majesty, begs a private audience with your highness."

"Hal! the very object of my thoughts: speak of Satan and his imps appear," muttered the king, and aloud he added:

"I will receive him, and I wish no intrusion until I call."

The servant bent low in obeisance and retired, and the king poured out another cup of coffee, and was quietly sipping it, with apparent relish when Captain Tudor Vashti was announced.

He was in full uniform, and was certainly a strikingly handsome man, and so the king

thought, as he advanced with martial step, and bent before him.

"Your majesty, I have come to report that I have returned home without orders, and crave your pardon for so doing," he said in a low tone.

"Captain Tudor Vashti, whom I have elevated to the command of my own vessel, and sent on an important cruise in foreign waters, cannot have returned home without orders, unless he had ample reasons for so doing," said the king sternly, and yet gazing with some degree of kindness, and considerable admiration upon the dashing young scapegrace.

"Your majesty shall be the judge if you deem I had ample cause."

"I am listening, sir."

"My official reports of my action with and capture of a pirate vessel was sent home, your majesty—"

"And read, and a mark in your favor set down, sir."

"I lost quite a number of my crew in that action, your majesty, and a tornado shortly after, swept several more into the sea to perish, and then followed a mutinous disposition upon the part of more—"

"Mutiny in my service, sir?"

"Not open, your majesty; but there were dark looks and threats from those I had punished."

"A good officer, Captain Tudor Vashti, should never give cause for mutiny on his vessel, and if it did occur, promptly meet it in a way that would prevent further trouble."

"Your majesty is the best judge of whether I am capable of the position your highness has so kindly assigned me to."

"I am not blaming you, Captain Vashti, without knowing the facts."

"Your majesty will remember that my crew had an easy life of it when here, only running out to sea now and then to give your majesty and the royal family an airing, and—"

"Yes, you were becoming play sailors, all of you, and I thought a hard voyage would do you good, but you tire of hard knocks, and run back to an anchorage where you can enjoy your club dinners and flirtations."

"Your majesty is severe; I had hoped that I had done my duty."

"Oh, yes; but about this coming home?"

"Your majesty has just heard that the combat and the tornado made me short-handed, and with some of my crew mutinous, and an officer in irons—"

"An officer, sir?" and the king's blue eyes dilated.

"Yes, your majesty; Midshipman Brandt Greyhurst, of Sealands."

"No, no, none of that name ever did a deed to stain their honor."

"I am sorry to report, your majesty, that Midshipman Greyhurst has done so, for he asked leave to return home, and upon my refusal of the request, he deserted the ship and swam out toward a packet that was getting under way; but he was too late, the vessel sailed, and he was retaken, and I brought him home in irons."

"You did right, Captain Vashti, but it is hard for me to think evil of one bearing the name of Greyhurst; where is he now, sir?"

"He escaped last night, your majesty."

"Escaped! a prisoner escape from a king's ship?" said the king sternly, and he added:

"There has been gross negligence in this, Captain Vashti."

"He was in irons, sir; they were filed off, and he dropped out of the port last night and swam ashore."

"Placard him, sir, in my name, as a deserter and a felon, and spread it through the kingdom."

"I will obey your majesty's commands; but I sent to the Tower three of my crew, the mutinous ones I referred to, your highness, and whom I charge with making an attempt upon my life."

"Hal! I will dispatch word to Friedland to have them executed with the setting sun; this germ of mutiny in my navy must be stopped at once, and when Greyhurst is retaken, I will make a public example of him."

"I thank your majesty; now I have a favor to ask of your royal highness."

"I will hear it, sir."

Nothing abashed by the stern manner of his king, Tudor Vashti said:

"The pirate vessel I sent home, your majesty, as a prize, is one of those American built schooners, that sail like the wind, and she is much larger and more seaworthy than the Lance, and showed us a clean pair of heels, your majesty, in spite of our speed, until she grounded."

"I saw her, as I came up the Thames, your majesty, almost a perfect wreck; but she can be made as staunch as ever, and even faster, and heavily armed and manned, I will pledge myself, your majesty, to return to American waters and soon hunt from the seas the bold buccaneers that are doing such damage to your majesty's merchant service."

"It was finding the Lance too light for the service, and the loss of some of my crew, and mutinous spirit of others, that brought me back to England, your majesty, without orders, for I

hoped for your highness's clemency and royal favor."

"And wherein had you the right to expect greater favor at my hands, sir, when your wild life here, before your departure, almost caused me to regret having interested myself in your behalf?" and the king looked straight into the face of the young profligate, who boldly replied:

"It is said, your majesty, that blood is thicker than water, and I sought to see if the words held true."

The king turned deadly pale, and sunk back in his velvet chair, his blue eyes fixed with a strange look upon the daring man before him.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE POWER OF A SECRET.

FOR some moments a silence fell between the king and his daring subject, for, so stunning had been the effect of Tudor Vashti's words, that his royal master seemed speechless.

And yet how simple had been the utterance, though there was in them a significance that the king felt evidently, and while his very manner showed that the Jew's story of the young captain's birth was true, that personage stood before his majesty, a quiet smile upon his face, and triumph burning in his eyes.

"I do not exactly understand your words, sir," said the king after an instant or two of silence that was growing painful.

"I merely said, your majesty, that I trusted your kindness to me had a motive which I am cognizant of."

"Sirrah! do you dare attribute motives to me to my very face?"

"Your majesty is angry with me, because I have told him that I was aware of the great goodness he has ever shown me being prompted by feelings that sprung from his heart."

"Boy, you say that you know why I have befriended you; who has told you?" and the king's voice quivered.

"One whom the penalty for divulging the secret cannot fall upon," was the calm reply.

"What! do you mean that he is so high in rank I dare not have the doom, of which you seem to know, carried out?" and the king arose excitedly and his hand hovered over a bell upon the table.

"Your majesty, the one of whom I speak, even your power cannot harm."

"Hail what mean you?"

"She is dead," and Tudor Vashti having readily told the lie, or insinuation as to where he had gotten the news of his birth, remained silent, while the king sunk back in his chair and buried his face in his hands.

After a moment he raised his head, and said sadly:

"I know from whence came thy knowledge of this secret, and yet I deserved not that she should have told it, though it was but natural for her mother's heart so to do."

"So let it be, and let there be between us two the same wall that there has ever been, and not one tendril of affection, strive it ever so hard, to climb up to look over into the heart of the other."

"That past is dead, so let it rest and bury its dead," and the royal, proud head again drooped, and even the selfish, heartless son bent his face so that its emotions, if any flitted across it, remained hidden.

Suddenly raising his eyes, the king said in his quick, commanding tones:

"Captain Vashti, your favor is granted, sir; the American vessel shall at once be hauled to the Tower dock and put in perfect repair, armed fully and manned and equipped as you direct; but until she is ready for sea, remain in command of the *Lance*, and hold yourself in readiness for a pleasure cruise with her majesty and her children at any time."

"It shall be as your majesty commands," was the respectful reply.

"And now, Captain Vashti, I will write you an order on your—your—I mean upon Mr. Ross Vashti, for the sum of twenty-five thousand pounds, leaving him to believe it to be for the fitting out of your vessel, but which I wish you to use in redeeming the property you have mortgaged to a Jew, and which I have heard of."

"Tudor Vashti's face flushed, as the king spoke, but he made no reply, and his majesty continued:

"When you have gotten back your estate, you will still have a handsome sum left, and I hope you will put it to good use, and not gamble it away as you have all you have possessed in the past."

"I shall keep my royal eye upon you, Captain Vashti, and I pledge you my kingly honor that you shall rise or fall, according to what your actions deserve."

Turning to his table again, the king hastily wrote an order upon Ross Vashti's banking-house for twenty-five thousand pounds, and handing it to the young captain said, sternly:

"Here, sir, is the money with which to redeem your honor and estate; see that it is used for both."

"When your vessel is ready for sea I shall give you a roving commission, without limit of

waters or time; our audience is at an end, Captain Tudor Vashti."

The youthful captain, with the triumph he had gained sparkling in his eyes, bent his head low before his king, and retired.

Entering the carriage in waiting before the royal palace, he drove to a printing-office, and had the placard struck off that offered a reward for "Brandt Greyhurst, Deserter and Felon," and then returning to his cab, bade the coachman drive to "Enoch Shylock's; a Jew, in Monmouth street."

"I'll surprise old Enoch, I think, and then visit my respected father at Sealands."

So saying, he settled himself back on the cushions, while a look of devilish delight came over his face.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE KING'S DRAFT.

"WELL, my dear captain, your visit is so unexpected, I fear to ask if there is trouble?" and Enoch Shylock looked up somewhat anxiously as Tudor Vashti entered his private office.

"No; I only called on a little matter of business, Jew, to ask the amount due on the mortgages you hold against my property."

"What matters it, Tudor Vashti, when you cannot take them up?"

"But I can, Jew."

Enoch Shylock elevated his eyes, and, yet, concealing instantly his astonishment, said, casually:

"Ah! been successful for once at play."

"Not at play, exactly, but at another game, Jew; now let me know the amount due on mortgages and interest."

The Jew quietly turned to a large book, and running his eyes over several papers, said:

"Let me see, captain; the mortgages amount, with interest, to twelve thousand and ninety pounds."

"And last night I gave you a note for twelve thousand dollars; I will take that up, too; so give me the change out of this order for twenty-five thousand pounds."

The Jew calmly took the paper, and again his eyebrows were raised in surprise, as he said:

"It is an order on Vashti & Company, bankers."

"Yes."

"For twenty-five thousand dollars?"

"Yes, as you see."

"They are good men?"

"Yes."

"And the king is the drawer of the draft?"

"Yes, as you see."

"He banks with them I know."

"Yes."

"His draft should be good."

"Should be good! it is good, as you know."

"Yes, if he wrote it."

"I do not understand, Jew."

"If he wrote the draft."

"He did, all of it."

"And gave it to you?"

"Yes."

"Strange."

"What is strange?"

"That he should give it to you."

"It is to fit out an American vessel I captured under a pirate flag, and sent home as a prize."

"She is to be fitted out here?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In the Tower dock."

"Why does not the Admiralty's Treasurer pay for it, and not the king out of his private account?"

Tudor Vashti saw that the wily Jew had caught him in a trap; but he said, impatiently:

"This vessel goes on a special service, Jew."

"I don't doubt it, captain."

"Well, give me the balance of the draft due me, after taking out for my mortgages and notes."

"What a pity."

"What?"

"That I have not got the notes."

"Why, I only gave them to you last night."

"Yes, but I negotiated them."

"You were in a hurry, Jew."

"That is the way I make my money, Captain Vashti."

"Well, send your clerk to take them up."

"It cannot be done."

"Cannot! why?"

"They are out of my possession."

"That you just said; so send to the man who has them."

"He will not give them up until the day they are due."

"He must!"

"He cannot."

"He shall!" shouted the officer.

"Don't get excited, Captain Vashti, for it will do no good," coldly said the Jew.

"Then give me my notes."

"Impossible; upon the day of maturity I will have them here for you."

"Curses on you, Jew Shylock! you wish to hold those signatures against me for some purpose of your own."

"I have the draft I got from your suicidal friend, captain, if I wished to use it."

"True; then deduct the mortgage money out of this draft, and hand me the balance."

"But how about the fitting out of the American vessel?"

"How?"

"The king gave you this draft to pay for it?"

"Yes."

"If you spend it for yourself, what will the king say?"

"That is my look-out," and the face of Tudor Vashti flushed at being again led into a snare by the cunning Israelite.

"That is my affair, not yours."

"It was my interest in you prompted the question, dear captain."

"Curse your interest in me."

"You Christians plead humbly to the Jew when you need money, and curse him in your prosperity."

"You deserve what you get, for you thrive on the vices and follies of other men; but cash that draft, as I asked you to do, and when the note comes due, I will take it up."

Enoch Shylock again looked carefully at the draft, and said:

"I cannot cash it, Captain Tudor Vashti, until I know that it is good."

"Do you dare to doubt its genuineness?"

"Yes."

"Hail you dare—"

"Hold! no threats, no hostile demonstrations, Tudor Vashti, or you may not escape so easily as last night, and your life then hung by a thread."

The tone and manner of the Jew caused the young officer to sink back in his chair, for he remembered well the scene of the night before when he had been under the aim of the fair Jewess.

"You doubt the draft?" he said, hoarsely.

"Yes, for but last night you executed before my eyes a most skillful piece of forgery."

"Curse you, Jew! You insult me because you know I am in your power."

"You should not have so placed yourself, Tudor Vashti."

"Don't moralize to me; but tell me if you believe I have forged this draft on Ross Vashti, in the king's name?"

"I do not say that, captain; but I must be cautious."

"Then give the mortgages into the hands of your clerk, and let him drive with me to the bank, and I will pay him the sum due and get them from him."

"Enough, so that my name does not go on a paper that might, mind you, I say might be forged."

"Then call your clerk."

"No, my daughter shall go with you."

"Your daughter?"

"Yes."

"Why should you send her?"

"I have my reasons."

"I care not if Satan goes, so I get the unpleasant duty off my hands; bid her hurry, for it is nearly time for the bank to close."

"You will send her back?"

"She certainly is not one of a race whom I would select to run off with," was the insolent reply.

"I am ready, father," and Adina stepped before the two, looking ravishingly beautiful, and evidently having heard all that passed between them.

Tudor Vashti started and colored, and would have stammered out some apology, for he was seldom rude to a woman; but her smiling face caused him to hope she had not heard his remark, and he conducted her to the carriage in waiting, and fifteen minutes after he held the mortgages of his estate, and over twelve thousand pounds in crisp bank notes, while Adina the Jewess was on her way back to her father.

But Tudor Vashti was not yet wholly at his ease, for the note he had given the Jew, with the forged indorsement of Ross Vashti, was not yet in possession, nor was the draft given before, and until he held possession of these, he could not be contented.

"To-morrow I will run up to Sealands; but now for a dinner at the club and then to try my luck once more," he muttered, as he strolled into a fashionable club house on the Strand.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ROSS VASHTI AT HOME.

FROM the crowded marts of London, the busy hum of mercantile life, and the whirl of pleasure, back to the sea-shore where the wash of the waves, the song of birds, and sighing of the winds mingle together in delightful harmony, I would have my reader accompany me.

Not to the old Castle of Sealands, grand in its ruins, nor to the Wizard's Well beneath its cavern-hollowed rocks, but to the villa of the estate, built by Ross Vashti, and made, through the lavish use of gold, a mansion of rare beauty and comfort, surrounded by gardens and grounds which were an Eden of beauty.

In the grand library, with its showy trim-

gings, crimson curtains, and rows of costly books, sat Ross Vashti the master, gazing vacantly through the open window upon the sea view in the distance.

At his hand, upon a small table, were a pile of opened letters and papers, showing that he had but just finished reading his mail, and glancing at the news items.

But the master of Sealands had changed in the past few days, from the man of a week before, and rumor had it, that his severe illness of only short duration, had turned his dark locks white, and certain it is that he had one evening sought his room, leaving good-night for his young bride, and a demand not to be disturbed, and the following morning was a gray-haired man.

There were hints among the servants of a shock received, losses of property, and all that; but the very day after he again appeared at the head of his household he sent to London and ordered a superb set of diamonds for his wife, and which cost a small fortune.

To his bride he complained that neuralgia had whitened his hair, and so the matter dropped, for reference to it, all saw, caused the master's face to grow more stern and gloomy.

As he sat there that afternoon in the library, some days after his moonlit interview with an avowed Satan in the tower of Castle Sealands, he mused half aloud, and the subject of his musings was one who has already conspicuously figured in this story.

"In the name of all evil spirits, why has the boy come back here?"

"I hoped to have gotten rid of him for nearly two years to come, or a year at least, and here I find that he has returned to London, and is now doubtless gambling his pay away, that has accumulated since his departure.

"Why did not some kind tornado sink him, or did not that pirate serve me a good turn by killing him, I wonder?"

"The king, when last I saw him, said nothing of the intended return of the boy, and I do not understand his coming back.

"Well, I am ahead of him with Lois, at any rate, and I shall finger her fortune, when it comes, thanks to the kindness of that good Jew Shylock, for telling me what he did, and her avaricious father who sold her to me, for I have sense enough to see that she cared nothing for me, and still loves that accursed Brandt Greyhurst.

"Ha! ha! ha! have I not had sweet revenge on the name of Greyhurst for the blow the boy's father gave me years ago when he stole from me the woman I then so madly loved?"

"Well, they are both in their grave now, Nanine and Paul Greyhurst, and yet I have not done with my revenge, for their son must die a beggar."

Just then his muttering to himself was broken in upon by the entrance of a servant, who said politely:

"I have to announce, sir, that your son, Captain Vashti, has just arrived, sir, by post."

"I will see him here," said Ross Vashti aloud, while to himself he muttered:

"He is dead broke, I'll warrant, and will take oath that filial piety has brought him; but the king has forbidden me giving him more money to squander, which I cannot but regret as it was convenient for me to get my pickings out of— Ah! Tudor, my dear boy, you are welcome, nevertheless you have given me a great surprise," and Ross Vashti arose and advanced toward the tall, handsome man who had entered the room with quick, firm tread.

But Tudor Vashti came to a sudden halt, and the hand he had half extended dropped to his side, as he stared in open-eyed wonder at the man who welcomed him, and asked in surprised tones:

"Have you gone back, sir, to the fashion of powdered hair again?"

The face of Ross Vashti turned pale, while he answered impatiently:

"Of course you must comment upon my hair, sir, even before you return my greeting; no, sir, I am getting so accursed old that my hair has grown gray, or rather your fast life, led in London before you left, has frosted my head."

"Oh no, do not lay it to my door, but be frank and say it is a guilty conscience."

"Boy! Tudor! I will not—"

"Now, now, don't let us quarrel, but accept my congratulations upon your marriage, and when I meet the fair bride I will offer her my condolences: but by all that's holy, tell me

why you, nearly half a hundred years old, have married a child hardly out of her baby-clothes?"

"Tudor, I will not listen to such language from you: besides I am only forty-one, and Lady Lois Vashti is—"

"Almost seventeen; but how fine that sounds, *Lady Lois Vashti*, but I know her to be a lovely woman, and you are to be congratulated as sincerely as she is to be consoled with; but come, can you not offer me a glass of wine, for my throat is full of the dust of travel, and to-night after dinner, and I have paid my devoirs to Lady Lois Vashti, we will have a little talk on business together."

"Business with you means an advance of money for your dissipations," growled Ross Vashti.

"True, I am dead broke, for I lost several thousand pounds lately for three nights in succession."

"Back to your old traits again: I had hoped that your cruise would have benefited your character."

"Oh Lord, no; it only sharpened my appetite for gaming— Ah! this is my sweet girl mother," and the young officer arose, as Lady Lois just then entered the room, and with the courtly grace he so well knew how to assume at will, he crossed over to her, took her hand, and bending low kissed it, while he continued pleasantly:

"I am glad to renew our acquaintance, Lady Lois, for I have known you ever since you were a wee girl, and admired you so much, that you may remember, before I sailed for the Americas, I wrote and offered you my heart and hand; but my father anticipated me, it seems, and what was my loss is his gain, while I have the sweet assurance that you will be a mother to me if not a wife."

For an instant Lady Lois seemed as if about to resent this bold address; but it was said so openly, and in such a deferential manner, that she laughed it off pleasantly, and dinner being announced, the three went into the dining-room, and together passed what would appear to an ordinary observer a delightful evening; but in the heart of each there was an aching void, though their faces were wreathed with smiles.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE VALUE OF NEWS.

"Now, sir, as your fair bride has left us to go to the land of dreams, in which your hoary head will doubtless be continually popping up, like a nightmare, between her and a buried love, allow me to suggest that we turn to business."

"I know of no business arrangements between us, Tudor."

"I can soon tell you, sir."

"It is gold you wish, I am certain; but you have your pay, your estate should yield you a generous income, and you could live like a noble, were it not for your love of gambling."

"I have news for you, which I will first make known to put you in good-humor."

"No news will make me advance you one cent."

"We'll see; would you not like to hear that one whom you looked upon as an enemy, if I remember aright, and had cause to dread as a dangerous rival, had done that which brings ignominy upon his name?"

"Ha! whom do you mean, Tudor?"

"Why what an old gallant you must be to have had so many rivals as to forget the one to whom I refer."

"Ah! you mean Brandt Greyhurst?"

"Yes, the boy whose intended bride your money bought."

"Well, what of him?" impatiently asked Ross Vashti.

"First, he got the news, in some way, that you were to marry the Lady Lois, and at once asked to come home, in a packet ship that beat us here four days; but I befriended you most nobly, and refused him permission, and the result was that he deserted the *Lance* to sail on the ship, but was taken and brought back in irons."

"Ha! ha! ha! a Greyhurst desert his ship? This is indeed news," chuckled Ross Vashti.

"Oh, I knew the news would please you; but it will give you more joy to know that he escaped when we anchored in the Thames."

"Escaped! is he at large?"

"Oh yes, but the king offers a large reward for him, and if he is taken he will at once be publicly executed."

"But he may come to this neighborhood, and I will at once give orders to the servants to keep watch for him, and whatever the king's reward may be, I will double it to the man who takes him dead or alive," and unheeding Tudor Vashti's remonstrance he called a servant and at once sent forth the tidings regarding the deserter, and made known his own generous offer to his captor, but demanded that the news should be kept strictly away from the ears of Lady Lois.

"You fear the boy may run off with your bride," suggested Tudor Vashti with mock innocence.

"No, sir, I have no such fear; but I wish to see the last Greyhurst under the ground," said Ross Vashti, almost fiercely.

"Now, sir, for another piece of news; I drew from your banking house before leaving London twenty-five thousand pounds."

"Twenty-five thousand devils! who dared to let you have that sum without my order?" yelled Ross Vashti.

"Your tool whom you honor with the title of partner."

"I will discharge him at once, and—"

"Discharge a partner?" Why I see the partnership was only a blind, and that he was really a tool as I before suspected."

"And he dared to give you that immense sum?"

"He dared not do otherwise."

"What do you mean, Tudor Vashti?"

"I had the king's order for it, or draft," was the provokingly cool reply.

"You had the king's order for twenty-five thousand pounds?" and Ross Vashti looked at the young man in utter amazement.

"Certainly; I am ordered to a larger vessel, fitting out for me to go pirate-hunting on a roving commission, and I have to pay for the equipment of the craft."

"Ah! but I think the king makes a mistake to place so large a sum in your hands to disburse; he should have let me attend to it."

"Oh, no, not to get your twenty per cent. interest out of, for you are as usurious as Shylock, the Jew, when you can be."

"What know you of that man?"

"I have heard of him."

"Well, sir, to return to the king's act; did your capture of the pirate craft you sent home to England, win you this favor?"

"No."

"What did then?"

"You consider yourself interested?"

"Certainly."

"Upon what grounds?"

"Being your father it is but natural."

"Upon the same grounds the king gave me the money."

White as his snowy locks now turned Ross Vashti, and his lips quivered, as he strove to speak, yet no sound came from them, and, with a mocking laugh, Tudor Vashti continued:

"How deeply it affects you to find out that I know the little secret you have, with others, so carefully hidden; but I can bring back to your lips the power of speech you seem to have lost, when I say that I intend to use my knowledge."

"In Satan's name! what would you do, mad boy?"

"Ah! you can talk now; gold is the magic word to open your lips; well, you ask what would I do?"

"Why simply ask of you a loan on a verbal promise to repay you when I can, and if I never do, I'll be that much better off, and you won't miss it."

"I can give you no money."

"Only a small loan; say, let me see, yes, call it ten thousand pounds."

"Ten thousand Satans!"

"Oh, no, one is enough, if you are a fair sample of the others; yes, I wish ten thousand pounds."

"I cannot spare half of that sum now, for this villa has cost a fortune, its furnishing another, and my marrying has caused me to lay out large sums."

"All of which you will get back as soon as your wife receives her inheritance."

She has no inheritance, for her father is little more than a beggar."

"But her uncle died rich, you know."

Again did Ross Vashti turn livid, and seemed to lose the power of exclamation, while Tudor laughed in the same low, mocking way, and continued:

"If I do not get the ten thousand on the first secret I told you I knew, I will charge a like

sum upon the secret of your wife's inheritance."

"No, no, if you really need the money I can give you a check for it to-morrow."

"Better give the check to-night, as life is uncertain, and sudden death frequent among high-livers."

"I would not be surprised if I lived to see you hanged, at the present rate you are going on."

"Nor I either, for if I cannot get gold by hunting pirates, I'll turn pirate and hunt gold," was the bitter reply.

Ross Vashti made no reply, but wrote a draft for the amount of money demanded, and putting it in his pocket, the young man arose and said in his sneering way:

"This will do for the present; but if I capture Brandt Greyhurst, I will call upon you for your reward."

"And I will gladly pay it."

"Doubtless," and with a light laugh Tudor Vashti left the library and was shown to the elegant suit of rooms assigned to him, while Ross Vashti remained seated where he left him, starting at every sound in the villa, and almost wholly unnerved by his interview with the bold and wicked spendthrift he had so long called his son.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LADY LOIS AS AN ALLY.

If it had been the intention of Captain Tudor Vashti to reform after his interview with the king, it certainly escaped his memory to carry out the resolution, for, having lost his twelve thousand pounds before he went out to Sealands villa, he returned, after a week passed in that delightful spot, with the banker's check for ten thousand more, which went as did the other.

Now and then he won large sums, but gold slipped through his fingers like sand, and his club associates were astonished at his losses, and yet the seemingly unending supply of his purse.

The secret was, Ross Vashti was being bled freely, through the secrets of the past, and another check, and another, quickly followed the one personally given to the young profligate.

In the mean time Tudor Vashti passed the greater part of his days superintending the work on his new vessel, organizing his new crew, drilling them at the guns, and getting all in perfect shape for the intended cruise, and the king's spies were compelled to report that the young officer was certainly not neglecting his duties, and his majesty, knowing of his gambling, contented himself with the remark:

"Well, the boy is sowing his wild oats, and if they do not turn into tares before he leaves, after he gets to sea all will go well, and I hope to hear good accounts of him."

"If he would only marry some fine woman it would be his redemption, and I will look around and select a wife for him."

At last Ross Vashti received the last straw that broke the camel's back, so to speak, in a demand upon him; for the command, for it was nothing more, for money, the time previous to this last insolent letter, had boldly hinted that the king should be informed that he, Ross Vashti, had told the young officer of his birth.

Of course the banker knew that his instant death would follow, and the money was sent, and in a few days was squandered, and a still more peremptory demand followed.

Ross Vashti was in dismay, for if he yielded to the incessant demands, even his enormous fortune could not hold out when pitted against the most skillful gamblers in London.

In his distress he turned to his beautiful, but sad-faced bride, telling her everything, and, to his great joy, she said:

"I can manage it for you, if you will trust me."

"Certainly, I will trust you, but how can you manage that wild devil?"

"How, I am not at liberty to tell, but I will guarantee that he makes no other demand upon you, if you will permit me to go to London, and alone."

Ross Vashti could not see how Lady Lois could effect any good by such a strange procedure, but he consented, as his gold was his idol, and even his young bride would be willingly sacrificed upon the altar of the god of Mammon, and the result was, that Lady Lois Vashti was driven in her private carriage to London, where, upon her arrival she stopped at a large hotel, dismissed her own equipage, and calling

a cab, got into it, and was driven to an inn in an obscure part of the city, thereby destroying all trace of her presence in town, a thing she seemed most anxious to do, from some reason known only to herself.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

CAPTAIN TUDOR VASHTI had just returned to his own rooms, which he had rented during his stay in London, and, in no enviable mood was pacing to and fro, with no seeming desire to seek rest, although the hour was past midnight.

He had just returned from the club, where he had gambled away a thousand pounds, borrowed from Sir Charles Friedland, that he had gotten that afternoon, and he was in no enviable frame of mind from several reasons.

First, he had gone to Shylock the Jew, and that worthy had refused to advance any more money, even on the very best forged paper, until the other notes were paid, and he had not the money to pay them, although they came due in two days' time.

Second, his letter to Ross Vashti remained unanswered, and he owed several thousand pounds of borrowed money from his intimates.

Third, his new vessel was ready for sea, and he had received a request, which amounted to a command, to go to sea within three days, as a buccaneer craft, seemingly tired of waiting for the cruiser to hunt him down, had gone to cruising around the coast, and, in spite of the Royal Navy, was committing numerous piracies within sight of the English shores.

A sudden knock upon the door caused Tudor Vashti to start, and in answer to his call his valet entered.

"There is a young gentleman here to see you, sir, and he has called several times before to-night."

"I care not to see anyone, Buck."

"He says he must see you, sir."

"Is it Mr. Morley, or any of my officers?"

"No, sir, I never saw him before; he is quite young and very handsome."

"Show him in, and I'll soon know why he calls at this late hour," and Tudor Vashti commenced his walk to and fro once more.

Presently the door again opened, and a youth of slender form, jet-black hair, blue eyes, well dressed, and wearing a slight mustache entered, and bowed low to the officer.

"Well, sir, how can I serve you at this late hour?" said Tudor Vashti, looking closely at the youthful visitor, not altogether liking his looks.

With another bow, and a twirl of his cane, the visitor said in broken accents:

"I have not ze plaiser of speak English perfectment, Monsieur Vashti; vill you speak ze language Francaise wid me?"

"Yes, if you prefer it," was the prompt reply in perfect French.

"Now, sir, state the cause of your visit."

In the same language, and the purity of accent proving him to speak it to perfection, if it was not his native tongue, the youth replied:

"My call upon you is not a pleasant one, sir."

"Ah?"

"True, sir, for I came from Monsieur Ross Vashti, your father."

"Indeed! then I suppose you are to give me a lecture with the money you are to hand over to me," said Tudor Vashti with a sneer.

"Neither, sir, I assure; but I have come to give you advice."

"Which I take from no one; give me the money that was sent me and depart."

"I have no money for you, sir."

"What! did not Ross Vashti send me the money I asked?" cried the officer angrily.

"He did not."

"Then he shall regret it."

"On the contrary, sir, you will regret it, if you push matters against him."

Tudor Vashti wheeled suddenly in his walk, which he had kept up, and said almost savagely:

"Boy, I've a mind to hurl you out of that window for your insolence."

"Oh no, you will not add that to your other crimes," was the bold retort.

The officer made a step forward, as though to carry out his intention; but there was something in the fearless, confident bearing of the youth, slight, and seemingly fragile as was his form, that checked him.

"State your business with me, and leave, ere I do that which I regret," he said hoarsely.

"My business, sir, is to say that Mr. Ross Vashti declines to be blackmailed any longer, even by you, and will give you no more money to squander at the gambling table."

"He shall, by Heaven!"

"He shall not!"

"What! do you dare me?" and the officer raised his clinched fist.

"I do," was the fearless reply.

Again the bearing of the youth checked the man's impulse, and he said:

"Who, in the name of Satan! are you?"

"One who knows you, Tudor Vashti, well, or I would not trust myself in your power."

"Hold! you have blackmailed Ross Vashti into giving you money, and I intend it shall stop."

"Bah! what power have you to say nay?" was the contemptuous question.

"Listen and judge: do you remember five years ago, when you came home from sea and visited your father at the villa, which he was just building, and preferred to live in, to the gloomy old castle?"

"Yes!" was the abrupt reply.

"One day, strolling along the cliff with your gun, you met a person you little expected to see there— Why, Captain Tudor Vashti! how pale you are."

But with an effort the officer controlled his emotion, and the youth continued:

"Some hot words passed between you, and then you came to the ruined castle together, and there was one who heard the stranger implore you to act honorably and make her your wife, for it was a woman in the garb of a man."

"Well, the whole story came out, of your having bound the innocent girl to you by a false marriage, and then deserted her, after forcing her to swear never to divulge the secret; but she loved you still, Tudor Vashti, and learning that your vessel had returned from a foreign cruise, she fought you out and threatened to tell Ross Vashti all, and then even go to the king."

"You entreated, you implored, you threatened, but all to no purpose, for she was determined, and you bade her go, and, as she turned from you, you sprung forward, seized her in your arms, and hurled her into the sea."

"Two days after a fisherman found her body, and she was buried in the village churchyard, and the world knew not of the cruel wrong you had done the poor girl, and the heinous crime you had concealed it with: but I knew it, Tudor Vashti."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BEATEN AT HIS OWN GAME.

THROUGH the whole story told by the French youth, Tudor Vashti had stood like one in a trance, for that one cruel crime of his life he had believed known only to himself, and now, to his horror, he found it told as it happened, by the lips of a stranger.

"And who are you?" he asked hoarsely, as the youth said that he knew it.

"I am the one who witnessed the meeting on the cliff, and heard what passed, after you came to the castle together, and saw you do the deed."

"Did any one else see it?"

"No."

"Does Ross Vashti know this?"

"No."

"Does any one else know of it?"

"No."

"You and I are the only ones?"

"Yes."

Tudor Vashti stepped to the bell rope and rung for his valet.

"Buck, go to the yacht and bid Mr. Morley come up to the club and breakfast with me at eleven in the morning."

"Yes, sir," and Buck the valet left the house.

"Now my young French friend, you have made a great mistake in bringing Tudor Vashti to bay," said the man hoarsely.

"How so?" was the cool question.

"You have run yourself into a trap, for if I killed a woman to silence her tongue, I certainly shall have less compunction in killing a Frenchman, especially as the French are our natural enemies, you know."

This was said with the utmost *sang froid*, and with a smile of devilry on the face that a fiend might have been proud of.

"You will not touch me, Tudor Vashti," was the calm reply.

"I shall certainly kill you," was the equally calm response.

"One minute: you have proven yourself a blackmailer, as well as a murderer of the worst kind, and to save Ross Vashti I came to warn you that I would go to the king with my story, if you made another threatening demand for money."

"Say that you will not, and your secret is safe."

"No, I prefer to know that my secret is forever safe, and the same time I must have money, and will have it."

"You refuse my advice?"

"I do."

"Then do your worst, for I do not fear you."

Again the man hesitated, for the youth's manner was utterly fearless, though he must know that Tudor Vashti had sent his valet away simply to have him wholly in his power.

After a slight pause he suddenly sprang forward and grasped the youth by the shoulder with a gripe of iron, and murderous intent was in his eyes; but ere he could clutch the slender throat the youth cried:

"Unhand me, for I have officers awaiting me."

Tudor Vashti checked his impulse, and the youth continued:

"Go to that window, draw aside the curtain and you will see a vehicle, in which are three officers of the law; if I return not by two o'clock, and it is now a quarter of an hour to that time, they break into this house, and will seize you, for a written statement I sealed and placed in their hands to open should harm befall me."

The manner of the youth carried conviction with his words, and Tudor Vashti quickly released him, and became livid with fear; but, like a drowning man catching at a straw, he cried:

"Your story none would believe, for you are but an unknown youth."

A peculiar smile crossed the face of the stranger, and, after an instant, he said:

"Tudor Vashti, I intended not to reveal to you who I was; but to keep you in check I will do so, and if you will let Ross Vashti alone I will not betray the secret, which I have kept locked in my heart for five long years; but if you demand of him another cent, the king shall know all."

"Why I kept that fearful secret, which has been like a hideous nightmare in my heart ever since that fatal day, I know not, and could never explain to myself; but I saw you commit the deed, for I sat in a niche of the castle, sketching the land view, and I witnessed all."

"I was but a child then of twelve, but I told no one of the fearful story, and I do not care now to do so, unless you force me to it; if you do, I have fortified myself with the name and home of the murdered maiden, and know all."

"But no one will believe you."

"Perhaps not, believing me to be an unknown French youth; but, as *Lady Lois Vashti, of Sealands, they will.*"

The dark wig and mustache were taken off suddenly, and with a cry of horror Tudor Vashti started back and gazed upon the daring woman.

But again catching at a straw, the man said:

"Lady Lois, you are in my rooms, and my valet shall return and find you here, and then your fair reputation is forever gone."

"You forget that I am accompanied by four king's officers, sir," was the haughty response, and Tudor Vashti saw that he was indeed beaten at his own game, and said humbly:

"I submit; command me and I obey."

"You know what I demand of you, and see that you disregard not my wishes; good-night, Captain Vashti; I wish you a pleasant breakfast with your lieutenant," and resuming her disguise, Lady Lois left the room and the house, and entering the carriage, where three men sat awaiting her return, she said:

"Drive to the inn and I will pay you for your services, which I am glad to say were not needed."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE JEW'S LITTLE GAME.

It was with a black face, and fierce humor, that Captain Tudor Vashti drove up to the home of Enoch Shylock, the evening after his interview with Lady Lois, and demanded to see the Jew.

Seated in his easy-chair, a table with his ledgers and account books before him, Enoch received the young officer with a calm and

pleasant mien that by no means poured oil on the troubled waters of the spendthrift's soul, for he cried fiercely:

"Curse your smiling face, when I am in such a humor, Jew."

"It is hard, I know, Captain Vashti, to have to pay out your money to redeem your note, when you could get rid of it so much more pleasantly by gambling it away."

"But I have no money to pay you."

Up went the arched eyebrows, as if in great surprise, and the Jew asked:

"Have you not come to redeem your notes?"

"No!"

"Ah! some other business then, for I remember they are not due until to-morrow."

"My business is that the note must remain over," flatly said the officer.

"Impossible, Captain Vashti."

"It is not impossible, Jew."

"It is."

"Why?"

"They are in other hands."

"They must be taken up."

"Give me the money to do so."

"I have it not, Jew."

"Then they must go to protest."

"Take them up yourself."

"I have not the amount I care to invest in them."

"You must."

"That is a strong word, captain, from a beggar."

"Sir!"

"Yes, from a beggar to one he asks a favor of."

"Oh, curses on you, Jew Shylock, you know you have the money and can take them up."

"I must have security."

"I have none to give."

"Then they go to protest."

"Damnation! would you ruin me?"

"Go to Ross Vashti and get money."

"He will give me nothing."

"Try him."

"I have tried him."

"Try him again."

"Fool! I have bled him of thirty thousand pounds since I gave you the notes."

"Ah! then you have money."

"I have not, for I lost it all in play."

"You should give up that evil habit, Captain Vashti."

"I will pledge myself to do so, if you will take up those notes."

"What interest is it to me whether you gamble or not? your vices are nothing to me," was the cold response.

"Ah! I forgot, you are a human vampire to live off of other men."

"It is the way of the world, my Christian captain; one half of the world steals from the other half; some do it on the high seas, and it is called piracy, others break into our homes and it is termed burglary, others still trade on the necessity of others and we call it business, while many thrive, under the cloak of the church and honesty, by swindling their neighbors, and it is called speculation; I tell you, Tudor Vashti, I am no greater sinner than my brother merchants."

"Hush your accursed moralizing and help me."

"I cannot, for you will not help yourself; I lift your head above water, and you make no effort to keep from sinking again."

"Oh, what shall I do?"

"I seldom give advice."

"Do so this time, good Enoch, for if those notes go to protest, they reach the hands of Ross Vashti, and my forgery will be known, and I am ruined."

"You should not have committed forgery."

"You tempted me."

"You should have resisted."

"Don't preach to me, Jew, for you know how I was situated, but tell me how to extricate myself."

"Advice is a commodity that has a marketable value in law."

"You mean I must pay for it?"

"Yes."

"Some other trap to lead me into, I'll warrant."

"You can decline as you please."

"Well, what is it?"

"I must have twenty per cent, if you get the money."

"Of course you must rob me."

"No, I save you from ruin."

"You shall have it, only help me out."

"Go to the king."

"I have thought of that, and was going to do so, telling him I had been reckless and throwing myself on his clemency; but a young man I had befriended years ago, and whom I meet at the club, came to me and told me secretly that he was one of the king's detectives, in fact the chief of the force of spies, and told me he had received orders to dog my steps, and that his men were watching me, and had secretly my every action to their master, and that his majesty had muttered *sotto voce*:

"He is nearing the end of his rope, in spite of all I have done."

"Now, Jew, you see I dare not approach him."

"No, it would not be wise."

"Besides, I received an order this day to sail to-morrow night in my new vessel, if ready, and pursue that accursed pirate that is spreading terror along the coast."

"Yes, the city is wild with rumors regarding him; by the way, did you ever capture your deserter?"

"You mean Brandt Greyhurst?"

"Yes."

"No, although the king trebled the reward offered."

"No one has seen him?"

"No; why do you ask?"

"I saw him the other night."

"You?" exclaimed the officer.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In Portsmouth."

"Why did you not arrest him, Jew?"

"I am not a king's officer," was the cold response.

"Nonsense; why did you not call aid?"

"I did not care to."

"Would you protect a deserter?"

"I am protecting a forger, sir."

Captain Vashti winced under this shot, and cowed his companion by saying:

"You did wrong, Jew, to allow him to escape."

"I am the best judge of my own actions, sir."

"It was in Portsmouth you saw him, you say?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"At the inn."

"What was he doing there?"

"Talking to me."

"You know that it was Brandt Greyhurst?"

"Yes."

"What did he say to you?"

"That is my business, sir."

"By Heaven! you are protecting a felon from justice, and are liable for it."

"Yes, if the king found it out."

"He shall, for I will tell him, sir—unless you do as I wish."

"You will hardly tell on yourself."

"Myself! what do you mean?"

"Why will you tell the king I am protecting a forger—yourself?"

"Curse you, Jew, I meant Brandt Greyhurst."

"Ah!"

"Devil take that *ah* of your's; it means more than a whole sentence of most men, and maddens me."

"You are easily upset, my Christian captain; but have you any idea who this pirate is?"

"No."

"Think!"

"I have no idea."

"I have."

"Who?"

"The deserter."

"Brandt Greyhurst?"

"Yes."

"By the Holy Neptune! I believe you are right, for he has only appeared on the coast the past six weeks, and his craft is reported as one of those fleet channel traders, so often used by smugglers, but larger and of trimmer build than the usual run of those vessels; what makes you suspect Midshipman Greyhurst, though, Jew?"

"I went down to Portsmouth to look at a lot of goods my agent reported were very fine, and that I could buy cheap—"

"Smuggled doubtless?" sneered the captain.

"I never ask a man where he gets his goods, sir."

"No need in that case; but go on, please."

"They were shown me by a man I had formerly had dealings with, and I had just concluded a bargain with him, when upon open-

ing the door at a rap, a young and handsome man entered, dressed as a sailor.

"I had before seen Brandt Greyhurst, and I at once recognized him."

"Well?" impatiently asked the officer.

"He said to my friend, whom I was negotiating with, that, as the breeze was light, and the tide would ere long be against them, it was necessary to sail at once."

"Smugglers! by all that's holy!"

"I did not ask them their calling, but paid for the goods, sent them to the city, and have realized largely by their sale."

"Of course, but why do you connect Brandt Greyhurst with this daring pirate?"

"Why, I saw the fleet craft the two men boarded put to sea, and before the next sunset there were half a dozen merchantmen captured, robbed and set fire to within sight of the land, and their crews reported the pirate just such a rakish little vessel as I had seen the night before."

"I believe you are right."

"I expect so, and it would be a feather in your cap to capture the pirate and the deserter midshipman at one and the same time."

"It would indeed; now I regret what I did."

"That you drove the midshipman to piracy?" asked Enoch in a well-feigned tone of innocence.

"No! but when I got the king's order to sail, I paid a man to prevent my going at once to sea."

"How could he?"

"The new vessel had been just drawn out of the dock, and was anchored in mid-stream, below some trading barges; one of them, by accident you know, Shylock, slipped her cable and drifted down upon the schooner, smashing her bowsprit, flying jib-boom, and crushing the martingale, figure-head, all into one confused mass."

"Did it sink her?" asked the Jew with interest.

"Oh no, nor injure her hull, and the damage can be repaired in a couple of days; but it served me well to gain time, as the yacht needs repairs too before she can put to sea, or at least I so reported, for I sent word of the accident to the king."

"Ah!"

"There is that accursed exclamation again, what does it mean in Hebrew, Jew?"

"More than the translators of your Bible, captain, could ever interpret," was the laconic response.

"Well, what is to be done about the notes? for I cannot pay them and must go to sea in two days."

"The last hour of grace is up with them at two o'clock to-morrow, captain."

"You must redeem them."

"I cannot."

"Jew, if you will save me this time, I will do anything you may ask of me."

"Anything, your highness?" and the Jew's eyes twinkled.

"Don't highness me, Jew."

"You are a king's son."

"Yes, one he dare not own; but, yes, I'll do anything you ask, for I will then go to sea contented, capture this pirate, and Brandt Greyhurst too, if he is on board the buccaneer craft, and win favor in the royal eyes once more."

"Captain Tudor Vashti, I shall hold you to your word, and I will take up your paper and save you from ruin."

"But what am I to do, Shylock?" asked the officer, impressed by the Israelite's strange manner.

"Marry! that is all."

CHAPTER XXX.

A STRANGE PROPOSAL.

A BURST of mocking laughter from the lips of Captain Vashti was the response to the Jew's demand.

"You seem pleased, my Christian captain," he said, with a sneer.

"I am, for I never took you for a fool before, Enoch."

"I am conceited enough not to think I am one now."

"And you wish me to marry?"

"Yes."

"And are in earnest?"

"Yes."

"And this is the request you make of me in return for redeeming the notes?"

"Yes."

"Who am I to marry?"

"Will you do as I say?"

"That depends."

"Upon what?"

"The woman."

"I should think she would be the one to object."

"Upon what grounds?"

"Many."

"Name them."

"You are a disowned son, a spendthrift, a gambler and a forger."

"You certainly do not mince matters."

"Why should I?"

"Yes, you do know me, well, who is the woman?"

"You agree?"

"I cannot do otherwise."

"You are wise for once."

"Who is she?"

"My daughter."

Tudor Vashti could not restrain the start he gave, and his face turned deadly pale, for, in those early days for a Christian to wed a Jew was looked upon as a heinous crime.

"You seem surprised," said the Jew who was eagerly watching him.

"I am."

"Why should you be?"

"She is a Jewess, I am a Christian."

"Bah! what are creeds where love is concerned?" sneered the Jew.

"Love! where is the love?"

"She loves you."

"Indeed! I am honored," and there was a tinge of sarcasm in the tone that caused Enoch Shylock's swarthy face to flush.

"So you are, for my daughter comes of a pure race, while you are a disowned son, the offspring of royalty that does not own you."

"You are right; but why one, who like your daughter is pure and noble, and must know much of my evil life, should feel affection for me I cannot comprehend," he said, deeply moved.

"The hearts of women are as inscrutable as the ways of the Providence your preachers talk so much about."

"Yes, I agree with you; she must know I am wicked."

"Yes."

"That I have not one good trait?"

"She thinks otherwise."

"Then love has made her blind."

"All love is blind except one kind."

"And what is that?"

"Jealous love."

"Ah, you speak truly, for jealous love is Argus-eyed, and can see more than there is to see; but you astound me, Jew, with your proposition."

"Why should I?"

"She is a Jewess."

"Yes."

"I a Christian."

"What doth it matter?"

"I fear the union."

"Do you not believe her a pure woman?"

"Yes indeed."

"Is she not beautiful?"

"Divinely so."

"Her form is good?"

"Perfection personified."

"She is well educated."

"So she seemed."

"Accomplished."

"Yes, for I heard her playing the harp with exquisite touch, and her voice is as sweet as seraphic music, while these paintings on the walls you tell me are her work, she rides splendidly, drives with a master hand, and I loved her at sight, so to speak, though it was not a love to in any way break my heart at loss of the object; but to marry her, Enoch, to marry her, is another thing."

"Very well, Captain Vashti, our interview need be protracted no longer."

"Now don't be in such a hurry, Shylock, let me think."

"You committed forgery without thinking."

"I wanted money then."

"Your need is greater, now."

"True, by marrying your lovely daughter I keep off ruin."

"Yes."

"But I have nothing to support a wife on."

"Your wife will have."

"Permit me just this once to make use of your expression—Ah!"

"I can interpret it for you from your lips; it means that if Adina is rich, it gilds the pill of matrimony," sneered the Jew.

"You are right, it does."

"Well she is rich, for I will give her to you by no means empty-handed."

"How much, about, for instance?" said the sordid man.

"Is it a bargain?"

"Name the sum."

"What do you wish?"

"The notes redeemed—"

"Yes."

"About ten thousand pounds in cash for myself—"

"Yes."

"That forged draft and the notes returned to me—"

"Yes."

"And, say, a handsome estate in the country for Adina to live upon—"

"Yes."

"And about twenty thousand pounds pin money for her to live on."

"Anything more?"

"Yes; that our marriage remain a secret unless I wish to divulge it."

"That is all?"

"Yes."

"Well, Captain Tudor Vashti, I will tell you what I will do, and name my terms, and if you do not accede to them, our transaction ends here."

"I am ready to hear."

"First, I will return you the notes and the draft to do with them as you please, for they are in the possession of a Jewish banker, my friend."

"Well?"

"Second, I will give to you for your personal use twenty thousand pounds."

"The devil!"

"I will give to your wife a handsome mansion in the city and an elegant estate in the country."

"Why, my dear Enoch, how could I ever believe you ungenerous?"

The Jew smiled blandly and continued:

"And she shall have jewels, laces and gold and silver service worthy of a princess."

"My noble father-in-law, in prospective, you are the acme of generosity."

"And I will give her deeds to property so invested, that it will yield her twelve thousand pounds per year, an annuity worthy the bride of a prince."

"Let me embrace you, my prince of Jerusalem!" cried the astounded officer.

"One moment, sir; you have heard what dowry goes with my daughter?"

"Yes."

"You are content?"

"More than satisfied."

"Now hear my terms."

"Your terms?"

"Yes."

"Of course there is some accursed afterclap to hit me hard."

"You can be the judge."

"I am waiting."

"In return I demand that I shall have the right to make the marriage known when and how I please."

"The devil, Enoch, that would crush me in London."

"The forged notes will not benefit you."

"But to marry a Jewess!"

"Is not so bad as what you have done, as you will find when the executioner of the Tower lays your handsome head on the block."

"Ugh! don't speak of such things, Shylock."

"Which shall it be: arrest for forgery, and execution, or marry a Jewess?"

"I'll take the Jewess."

"With the right to me to make known the marriage?"

"Yes, but don't be in a hurry about it."

"I shall suit myself."

"When is this interesting ceremony to take place?"

"To-morrow at noon."

"So soon?"

"The notes are due at two o'clock."

"Ah, me! I shall be on hand; my regards to my bride that is to be, Enoch," and with a shrug of his shoulders Tudor Vashti left the Jew's house and wended his way to the club, where he gave his draft at one day's sight, on the banking-house of Ross Vashti & Company, received the money, five thousand pounds, for it, intending to meet it with what he received from the Jew the following day.

Just before dawn he left the club moneyless, having lost the entire amount by his reckless playing; but his face wore no look of con-

cern for he had [made up his mind to follow the course laid out for him by Enoch Shylock.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN UNINVITED GUEST.

WHEN Captain Tudor Vashti's valet called him, according to orders, at nine o'clock, on the morning of the day set for his wedding, he found him sleeping calmly, as behooves a bridegroom on his marriage morn.

Awaking, he made a careful toilet, sent for a carriage, and drove to a jeweler's and made purchase of a costly set of pearls for his intended bride, telling the silversmith to send the bill that night to his club for payment.

As he owed only gambling debts, the young officer's credit was good, and knowing him, the silversmith gave him the jewels, and he then drove to his club for breakfast, and, after a sumptuous repast, having a spare half hour, sat down for a game with several of the early comers.

To his surprise luck sided with him, and he arose the winner of a thousand pounds.

"By the Lord Harry! the Jewess brings me luck," he said, as he left the club, and bade the coachman drive with all speed to Mounmouth street, for he was late, and that is an unpardonable sin in a bridegroom, though it is permitted with a bride.

Enoch Shylock, dressed in a suit of black, met him at the door, and he was led into the parlor, where he was struck with amazement at the exquisite beauty of his bride, who received him with a winning grace that made him feel that she was one to adorn his home, and would madden with envy his male associates at the prize he had won.

"You are ready, Captain Tudor?" asked the Jew.

"Yes, Enoch; where are the notes and draft?"

"The money, yours, is here, see!" and the Jew opened a morocco pocketbook he took from the table, and showed that it was full of crisp Bank of England notes of the denominations of thousands.

"In that pocketbook are the deeds to my daughter's property, and the money I give her, and see, these cases contain her jewels, and those boxes her silver service."

"But the draft and my notes?"

"I told you a Jewish banker, my friend, held them, he having negotiated them for me, and I expect his clerk with them each moment, as I asked him to send them here for payment; the draft I have here."

"Then let the ceremony go on," was the impatient response, and as the Jew left the room, Tudor Vashti crossed over to his intended bride and handed her the case of jewels he had brought her, while he said, in his soft, winning way:

"Adina, accept these from me as an emblem of your purity, and believe me when I tell you that I more than appreciate the sacrifice you make to wed one whom you know to be a wicked man; but your sweet influence, I feel no doubt, will win me from my evil ways, and from to-day I will become a changed being."

The beautiful eyes met his own, and she returned the kiss he imprinted upon her lips; but ere she could reply her father entered, accompanied by a magistrate and several witnesses.

The bride and groom then took their places by the table, their names were affixed to the marriage documents, and Enoch whispered in the ear of Tudor Vashti:

"Put, 'son of the king,' your highness."

With a reckless smile the young officer obeyed, and the ceremony was read by the magistrate, who, with his witnesses retired.

"One moment, your highness," and as the Jew spoke he opened another door and there entered a Jewish rabbi in his robes, and he was accompanied by half a dozen Israelites.

Then the ceremony of the Hebrew church was gone through with, and Adina the Jewess and Tudor Vashti were pronounced man and wife, and a proud smile rested on the face of the young bride, while her husband said:

"Now, my revered father-in-law, I must drive to my yacht, for I expect there a message from the king."

"You will find your wife not here, Tudor, but at the home I have given her up in the city; here is the address, and here is the money I promised you."

"And the notes?"

"Have not yet arrived."

"Then give them to Adina for me."

"I will, for I sent my clerk to hurry them along—ah! here is Ephraim now."

"The notes were taken up before banking hours closed yesterday," said the clerk.

Both the Jew and Tudor Vashti turned deadly pale, and the latter saw that the news was as unexpected to his father-in-law as himself; but he shouted:

"Impossible!"

"No, sir, the notes were taken up, sir," persisted the clerk.

"By whom?" asked Enoch Shylock in a voice that quivered, while Adina, with white face pressed forward anxiously.

"By Mr. Ross Vashti."

Here was another thunderbolt into the Jew camp, and the three seemed dazed, for what could it mean?

But before any one could reply, a servant entered, and behind her came one whom Tudor Vashti recognized, for it was the king's chief detective.

"Ah, Shirley, I am glad to see you," he said, with forced calmness, though his heart grew as cold as ice.

"And I to see you, Captain Vashti, for I was seeking you."

"Indeed; anything wrong?"

"The king desires your instant presence at the palace."

Both the Jew and Tudor Vashti knew well what this meant, but the latter said:

"I will accompany you in a minute; but permit me to present to you my bride, Madam Vashti, and my father-in-law, Mr. Enoch Shylock."

Fred Shirley was a gentleman, and he bowed at the introduction, said a few pleasant words, and then urged Tudor Vashti to accompany him.

"I will go at once; Adina, I will be home to a late dinner," he said pleasantly, but the smile upon his face was a mask to hide the fiendish determination in his heart, for he had suddenly formed a desperate plan of action, and was just the man to carry it out.

CHAPTER XXXII.

TUDOR VASHTI PLAYS A BOLD GAME.

"WELL, Shirley, what is the trouble at the palace?" asked Tudor Vashti, with feigned indifference, when the two were seated in the vehicle.

"There is no trouble there, but with you; ah, Vashti, I warned you and you heeded not my warning," said the chief detective sadly.

"Why, what the devil is the matter, man?"

"I will tell you: you did me a good turn in the past, Tudor, and I tried to return it, though I was derelict in my duty to the king in telling you that he had spies upon you."

"I hoped you would be cautious, and try and redeem yourself, but you became even more reckless, and now you have run yourself into the toils."

"Why, of what am I accused?"

"No one knows your crime—"

"Sir!"

"Do not grow indignant, for you cannot bully me, Vashti; I repeat, no one knows your crime other than myself, the king, and your father."

"And of what crime am I accused?"

"Forgery."

"What?" asked Tudor Vashti with feigned surprise.

"Of forgery!"

"Who dares accuse me?"

"Yourself, Vashti; your father came to town and in looking over his bank accounts, learned from his partner that a note, drawn by you, in favor of Enoch Shylock, and indorsed by him, had been sent in by the party holding it, asking if it would be paid several days before maturity, if five per cent was taken off for the accommodation, for the holder needed the money at once."

"Your father's partner declined, but yesterday your father called and took it up, and thus the secret came out."

"For a while he thought he would drop the matter, and let it go, informing you only that he had that in his possession to send you to the block; but this morning he thought differently, after sifting some of your past losses in gambling, and went to the king."

"I was sent for, and the king bade me find you, and I have done so."

"And I am to face the king and my father now?" asked the profligate turning livid.

"No, I have orders to take you to the Tower."

"Great God! to the Tower?" gasped the officer.

"Yes; the king bade me place a mask upon you and deliver you to Sir Charles Friedland, with orders to place you in the Life Dungeon."

"God have mercy! am I to die there?"

"You know what confinement in the Life Dungeon means."

"And Shirley, dear, good Shirley, would you take me there?" pleaded the prisoner, for such he now was.

"I warned you, Tudor."

"Oh that I had taken your warning."

"I deeply regret it."

"But, Shirley, remember, I served you once and you will serve me now."

"Alas! I cannot."

"But you must."

"No, I will not do aught to forfeit the trust the king has in me."

"Shirley, you are a poor man, and I have with me ten thousand pounds; say you could not find me, and it is yours."

"No, you cannot tempt me, Tudor."

"Listen; there is no haste in this matter, so return with me to the Jew's; they will keep the secret, and I will pay into your hands twenty thousand pounds, if you will only not arrest me, and will wait until night before you return to the king."

"No money will tempt me, Vashti, to betray my trust," was the firm response.

"Then by Heaven you shall die!"

With a sudden motion, wholly unexpected, Tudor Vashti drove a keen blade into the side of the detective, at the same time clutching his throat with an iron gripe.

In vain the poor victim of his own honor tried to cry out, for the knife had entered his heart, the grasp on his throat held him firm, and within half a minute he was a dead man.

"There, now I have outlawed myself; but he brought it upon himself by his false notion of duty to his king; no, no, Fred Shirley, no Tower of London for me, while the sea is open to my vessel's prow," and arranging the corpse in a sitting posture, and securely fastening it up, Tudor Vashti coolly leaned out of the window of the vehicle and ordered:

"Coachman, drive first to the St. James stairs."

With no hint of the tragedy committed so near him, the coachman obeyed, and soon after drew up at the river bank, and before he could dismount from his box, Tudor Vashti sprang out, and said quickly:

"Keep your seat and drive Mr. Shirley back to the home of Enoch Shylock, in Mounmouth street, where he joined me and here is your fare."

The coachman's eyes glistened at the five-pound note handed him, and after a profusion of thanks started to drive off, when the captain waved his hand, as though to the occupant of the vehicle, and called out:

"Au revoir, Shirley, old fellow."

Away dashed the coach with its ghastly rider, and hastily Tudor Vashti descended the river stairs and called to the boatman.

"Put me on board the king's yacht with all speed."

"She sailed two hours ago, your honor," was the startling reply.

"Sailed!"

"Yes, your honor, gone to hunt the pirate I heard."

"Then row me to the Black Dove," ordered the officer with forced calmness.

"You mean the American built craft sir?"

"Yes."

"She has just hauled out of the dock after repairs, and I heard was to follow the king's yacht, sir."

"Yes, I know; now row my man, if you wish a pound note."

This incentive sent the light boat flying down the river, and in a few minutes it ran alongside of the beautiful craft, which was again in perfect order.

Throwing the bank note to the boatman, Tudor Vashti ascended to the deck, and was met by Midshipman Leo Paulding of the Lance, who saluted politely, but looked surprised, while he said:

"I saw the Lance get under way, sir, and thought you sailed in her."

"No, I sent her ahead; you have twenty men on board with you?"

"Yes, Captain Vashti."

"My orders have been changed since the Lance sailed, so get up the anchor with all speed and we will run for open water; you act as lieutenant for the present."

The delighted midshipman sprung readily to obey, and in five minutes more the Black Dove, as Tudor Vashti had named his new vessel, was flying down the river, the admiration of all who saw her.

And upon her deck stood the man who had taken his destiny in his own hands, and had determined to give full vent to the devil that was in his nature.

With stern face, and burning eyes he paced the quarter deck, and, as he saw that he was safe from capture, for the schooner ran like a race-horse, he muttered:

"Now, my royal father, I'll make you tremble at the name of the son you disowned, for from yonder slender peak, from this night, shall float the flag of the pirate, and my Black Dove shall prove a Hawk among thy flocks of merchant craft."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING.

AN hour previous to the sudden sailing of the Lance, Paul Morley, the lieutenant in command, during the absence of Captain Vashti, was pacing the quarter-deck, watching the new vessel being taken out of the Tower deck, after her repairs, when a boat coming directly toward the yacht was hailed by a middy.

"Orders from the king," was the prompt reply, and a moment after Lieutenant Morley met at the gangway a young officer whom he knew to be an aide at the palace.

"Well, Saunders, I am glad to see you on board; but Captain Vashti is absent."

"My orders are for you, Morley, and not the captain, as you will see on reading this dispatch," and the aide handed the lieutenant an official paper, bearing the king's seal.

Breaking the seal, he read with evident surprise:

"ST. JAMES PALACE, 12 M.

"TO LIEUTENANT PAUL MORLEY,

"H. M. Armed Yacht, Lance.

"SIR:—His Majesty, the King, orders that you at once get under sail, with what force you have on board, and put in to Southampton, where you will land and report in person to the officer of the training ship at anchor there, and take from said vessel the number of seamen and marines you require for a full crew.

"Having done this, you are to proceed at once to sea and hunt down the hated pirate known as Fire-Eye, the Curse of the Coast.

"GLENFIELD,

"Sec'y to the King."

"Why, Saunders, what does this mean, when Captain Vashti is in command?" asked the amazed lieutenant.

"Do not know, unless Captain Vashti is to also go in his new vessel, which I see is repaired, after her being run into by the barge the other night."

"Yes; she is all ship-shape again, is thoroughly armed and equipped, and stored for a six months' cruise; all she needs is a good crew, and she'll make a name for herself; but I must not tarry with orders from the king in my hand. Mr. Manning!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" and Percy Manning approached.

"Order the anchor up and sail set at once; come, Saunders, and have a glass of wine."

"Yes; to toast you a *bon voyage*, Morley, and the wish that you win your captaincy," and the king's aide followed the lieutenant into the cabin, but soon returned, and, as he entered his boat alongside, the Lance was under way, and by the time he reached the St. James stairs she was gliding down-stream under the pressure of all the sail that would draw.

Arriving within three leagues of his destination a dead calm fell upon the sea, and a boat was lowered, and Paul Morley started for the town, with six good oarsmen, for he cared not to delay an instant.

But after an hour's pull a light breeze sprung up, and the lieutenant hoped that the yacht would feel it and overtake them, but a glance astern showed him that the puff of wind did not reach the Lance, seeming to merely follow the shore, for inland half a mile a sharp-prowed fisher-boat was gliding along merrily.

"That craft would sail with a bellows blowing on her canvas, sir," remarked a young reefer, watching the fishing vessel.

"So it seems, Dalton; I will hail him, and run on to the town, while you follow in the

boat," replied Paul Morley, and he sung out in his clear tones:

"Fisher-boat, ahoy!"

"Ay, ay," came across the waters, in a voice distinct and commanding.

"I am in haste to reach the town; can you give me passage for gold?"

"Willingly, sir, without pay; I always like to aid a king's officer," was the prompt reply, and the helm was put up, and the fisher-boat was guided so close to the stern of the cutter, that the lieutenant easily sprung on board.

"Come to the training ship, Dalton," he called out to the midgy, and then turning to the skipper of the fishing craft, continued:

"Your vessel sails with but a capful of wind."

"Yes, sir, she needs but the pressure of her sails to carry her along," answered the skipper, whose hand rested lightly on the tiller.

There were but two men in the little craft, which was not over three tons' burden, and a perfect model of symmetry.

One was the helmsman, a man of apparently forty years of age, dressed in a seaman's shirt and trowsers, and wearing a tarpaulin that he wore pulled down over his eyes, as though to shield them from the sunlight.

Contrary to the then usual custom, he wore a heavy beard, while his companion was a smooth-faced youth.

"Is not that craft the Lance, sir?" he asked, politely, looking far astern to where the yacht still lay becalmed.

"Yes, my man."

"I served on her once, sir, under Captain Vashti, but do not remember you, sir."

"No, I joined her from a frigate, when in the Indies."

"Is the captain on board, sir?"

"No, he is in command of a larger vessel, that has been specially fitted out for him. I am commanding the Lance now."

"She's a fine vessel, sir, and I would like to ship on her in a cruise against the devilish pirate that is such a terror on our coast now."

"Then you can, my man, for I am now going to the training ship to complete my crew, as I have but thirty men on board."

"I thank you, sir; I will put you on board the training ship, and then run down to the Lance to-night and join you."

"But she will come up to town with the rise of the wind."

"It's an all day, and if I mistake not an all night calm, sir; but we'll have a breath with the sunrise anyhow."

"Then she will come up then."

"And I'll be on hand, sir, for fishing, now-adays don't pay much, and I'd like a cruise to get my sea-legs on once more."

"You shall have it, my man, and your shipmate, too, if he wishes it."

"No, sir, he has to stay and look after the old folks; see, sir, there is not a feather-weight of breeze, and my little Spray glides along three knots to the hour."

"She does, indeed; there is the training-ship, I see," and the Spray was headed for the huge vessel, lying at anchor in the harbor a mile distant.

A short while more and Paul Morley went up the steep sides of the ship, and, with a promise to see him again, the skipper of the Spray headed inshore.

Landing, he left his companion in charge of the boat, while he went up into the town, and soon turned into the door of a dilapidated Sailor's Inn.

"Is Captain Opal here?" he asked of the red-faced landlord.

"Who wishes to see him?" was the surly response.

"The Scud."

"All right; up-stairs, first room to the right, knock three times."

The man obeyed, the door opened, and entering, he beheld a person seated at a table writing, and who, upon looking up, displayed the youthful, handsome, but stern face of Brandt Greyhurst.

The other was MacGregor, the Smuggler, of the Wizard's Well.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE PLOTTERS.

"MACGREGOR, old man, I am glad to see you," and Brandt Greyhurst sprung to his feet and grasped the hand of the visitor.

"And I to see you, lad; I mean captain, for I cannot call you lad now, after the name you have won."

"Yes, I am still the same, Mac; and no, I fear I am greatly changed," he said, sadly; but, after an instant he continued:

"There is no need of asking you if you received my message, for your being here proves it."

"Yes, captain, I got the message, and I was glad to come, for, when you began to make a name, the boys I had with me left to join you, and I was all alone; but I waited your orders before I would leave."

"You did right, MacGregor; you see, after my first run into the Wizard's Well with the cargo of wines, I got into a scrape with a king's cutter and had to fight, and rather liking it, I determined to cruise for bigger game than laces and liquors, and I hoisted my free flag, and I think the king has heard of me."

"Well I should say so, for Fire Eye, the Demon Sailor as they call you, is rather well known from one end of the coast to the other; but how is it I find you all ashore?"

"Why, I ran into a trap, got badly bulled by a frigate's broadside, but escaped in the darkness."

"But it was the little Scud's last run, for she was so badly wounded that I saw she would sink, so took to my boats, and sent her to the bottom."

"Under cover of night we came in here and my crew are lying close while I look up a new craft."

"Your messenger told me you were ashore, and wanted a new deck under you; how many men have you, sir?"

"Fifty-five all told here with me."

"And myself and the boy you sent after me make fifty-nine; they are enough."

"Not for my purpose, MacGregor, for I need a hundred, as I have determined upon a bold plan."

"First let me ask you, sir, how you would like the Lance?"

"The very craft I just thought of; but then I have my eye on a better one, which is a vessel I aided Tudor Vashti to capture from a West Indian pirate, and which the king, I learn has fitted out for him."

"First let us get the Lance, and with her take the other craft, for the yacht now lies becalmed several leagues away."

"Ha! that is good news; but she has a large crew doubtless."

"But thirty men on board, for she has come here for a crew from the training ship."

"MacGregor, the Lance is our vessel, and we must seize her to-night," said Brandt Greyhurst, earnestly.

"So I decided upon, and I will tell you all I know," and MacGregor went on to relate his meeting with Lieutenant Morley and his bringing him up to the city with him, and all that he discovered from the officer.

"MacGregor, it is now an hour to sunset, and I have no idea that the breeze will spring up; but if it does we must be prepared to take the Lance as she comes up to the town, and I will tell you how it can be done."

"There are fifty-nine of us now, and I can right here, through the landlord of this inn, ship forty more for any service, and, just after dark we must leave for the open water and meet the Lance."

"I will hail, imitating Morley's voice, and they will believe us the crew from the training ship running down to her, and we can throw ourselves on board and seize her."

"If she is still becalmed, then the work will be just as easy to do."

"So I thought, captain, for such was my plan, and I know it will be successful."

"But, MacGregor, there is one thing that I must insist on."

"Well, captain?"

"Paul Morley, Manning and the other officers on board are friends of mine, or rather were, while I am still friendly to them, and the men too I wish protected, so not a blow must be struck, or a shot fired, except in self-defense."

"I will do all I can to carry out your orders."

"You must, for you are my first officer, and I shall depend upon you; now to arrange for the work ahead, and once the Lance is in my possession, and the capture of the American schooner will follow."

"With Tudor Vashti."

"Yes, with Captain Tudor Vashti, the man I have sworn shall die by my hand," and Brandt Greyhurst spoke in a tone that boded no good to the man, who at that moment he

little dreamed was also a fugitive, and, by his own act, an outlaw.

But changing his tone, he quickly added:

"There is one thing I would know, MacGregor?"

"Well, captain?"

"What about Captain Reckless?"

"He died of the wound you gave him, sir."

"He deserved his fate for daring to pollute Lois with his touch," muttered the young sailor, but MacGregor caught the words.

CHAPTER XXXV.

IN THE TOILS.

As both MacGregor and Brandt Greyhurst had predicted, the breeze did not spring up with the setting sun, and, with the darkness the calm still rested upon sea and shore, and the air was hot and oppressive, foretelling a storm.

Shortly after nightfall, a boat pulled away from the dock near the dilapidated Sailor's Inn, and headed slowly down the harbor, to be shortly after followed by another, and then others, until four had departed.

Once at a safe distance, and out of the sight of prying eyes, and the hearing of inquisitive ears, the leading boat remained quiet upon the waters, and one by one the others came up, and joined it.

"Men, the yacht will not be able to leave her anchorage, as there is not a breath of air, so we must pull down to her and board."

"Remember, I answer all hails, and there is to be no bloodshed, except in cases of self-defense, and the man that disregards my orders, I will hang to the yard-arm of the Lance as soon as she is in my power."

"There are but thirty men on board, and, expecting a crew from the training ship, they will fall an easy prey to us. Now give way all!"

The speaker was Brandt Greyhurst, and he spoke in the terse, determined tones of a man who would stand no trifling and intended to be obeyed, and, at his order, to give way, the oars dropped simultaneously in the water, and the four heavily laden boats, bearing a hundred men, once more moved through the waters.

It was a long and hard pull, but the oarsmen were untiring, and at last the dark hull and masts of the Lance came in sight, and ere half an hour more a hail came across the waters.

"Boats ahoy! keep off!"

"Ay, ay, the Lance. I am Lieutenant Morley and the crew from the training ship."

"All right, sir; I did not know you," came in the voice of Holbrook Friedland, who was officer of the deck.

"Now men, remember; MacGregor, go to starboard with your two boats, while I head as I am," was the stern command of Brandt Greyhurst, and a moment after he sprang on deck followed by half a hundred men.

"You are my prisoner, sir; submit quietly and no harm will befall you and your crew," came in the stern accents of the young outlaw, and he held a pistol at the head of Holbrook Friedland, who glanced quickly around, and saw that the watch on deck were all overpowered, and that it would be madness to resist.

"I can do nothing else but surrender; but to whom?" and the young officer turned his gaze upon his captor.

But only a black mask met his look, for the countenance was fully hidden.

"You surrender, my dear sir, to him whom men call the Demon Sailor, from the fact that I have played sad havoc with some of the king's craft of late."

"What! are you that curse of the coast they also call Fire-Eye?" cried Holbrook Friedland.

"I am; but I mean you no harm, sir, only borrow your vessel to aid me to capture a better one I have my eye upon, as my craft went down some days ago from the effects of a broadside one of the king's frigates poured upon me; are the officers and crew all prisoners, MacGregor?"

"All, sir, and without a drop of blood spilt."

"I am glad to hear it; now get the men into the boats and I will tow seaward, for I care not to be so near in shore when the sun rises; but if I mistake not we will have a storm break with the dawn."

And the prediction was correct, for as the east grew gray with the approaching day, the

Lance went scudding seaward before a gale that broke with fury after the long calm.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CATCHING A TARTAR.

"SAIL HO!"

From the masthead of the Black Dove rung out the cry, which, no matter how often heard at sea, always sends a thrill through the bearer, whether he tread the quarter-deck or fore-castle.

"Whereaway?" came in the stern, clarion-like tones of Tudor Vashti, who, at the cry, came from the cabin and hailed the look-out.

"Dead ahead, sir."

"How does she head?"

"She is rising, sir, and is coming directly toward us."

"Ay, ay, I catch her now with my glass; helmsman, keep her as she is and we will soon have a view of this stranger, who will tell us what she is!" and Tudor Vashti kept his glass riveted upon the strange sail.

In half an hour more Leo Paulding approached him and said:

"I have just descended from the fore cross-trees, sir, and yonder craft is the Lance."

"The devil! then all is well with us, for we can divide crews."

"I hope so, sir, for this being at sea with but two men to a gun, and not enough to man the sails properly is not pleasant."

"I do not consult your pleasure, Mr. Paulding, but my duty," was the stern rejoinder, and as the midshipman walked away, Tudor Vashti muttered to himself:

"By the cross! but I believe Paulding suspects something is wrong, and the crew cast suspicious glances at me too, or my guilty conscience causes me to imagine so."

"Yes, that is the Lance, and I know she has not had time to run into any port and learn of my flight, so I will pick from her crew what men I think will follow my lead, and once with crew sufficient to man my guns, I'll soon get more."

Nearer and nearer the two vessels approached each other, and presently Tudor Vashti said in an anxious tone:

"I do not recognize a single officer on her deck; ah! I have it, Morley was ordered to take her to Southampton and she has been officered and manned from the training ship; but they cannot have heard of my flight, so I will say I was sent to overhaul the Lance and taking part of her crew cruise in company with her in pursuit of this Demon Pirate."

The two vessels were now quite near to each other, and as no hostile demonstrations were made upon either side, it was evident that some one on each craft, had recognized the other.

As they drew nearer, Tudor Vashti, in his trumpet tones, hailed:

"Ho the Lance, ahoy!"

"Ahoy the Black Dove," came back the answer, which caused Tudor Vashti to mutter:

"They are not all strangers on board, for there is some one who knows this craft; ah, there is Midshipman Friedland," and raising his voice, he called out:

"Luff sharp, and I will round to to starboard and board you."

"Ay, ay, sir," came in reply, and almost instantly the maneuvers were executed, and the two beautiful vessels lay quietly upon the waters, not two cables' length apart.

Hardly had the Black Dove become stationary, when a boat was lowered from the davits and came rapidly toward the Lance.

In the stern sat Tudor Vashti, his face pale, which was not to be wondered at under the circumstances, but determined and reckless, for he was not fully assured of what reception he would meet, though intending to brave it out if it was not a pleasant one.

As he crossed the gangway and stepped on deck, his eye fell upon a person in uniform, but with masked face, confronting him, and, while a sword was pointed at his heart, he heard the ominous words:

"Captain Tudor Vashti, you are my prisoner."

The first impulse of the entrapped man was to resist; but a glance at the strange faces around him, and he saw it would be madness, and he was not, as the reader has seen, a man to give up life while there was an atom of hope, and he drew himself up proudly, and demanded in haughty tones:

"What means this masquerading, sir, and outrage upon a king's officer?"

"It means, Captain Vashti, that you are my prisoner."

"And who are you, sir, that dare not show your face?"

"Men call me the Demon Sailor; perhaps you have heard the name," was the calm reply.

From white to livid turned the face of Tudor Vashti at the words, and he cast a quick glance around him, to assure himself that he really stood on board the Lance, and catching sight of Holbrook Friedland and several other familiar forms, he was reassured and cried:

"This comedy has gone far enough, sir; I know this vessel to be the Lance, and there stand several of my own officers."

"That may be, sir; but they are also my prisoners."

"Ho, Friedland! what means this masquerading farce on board a king's vessel?" cried Tudor Vashti.

"Unfortunately, Captain Vashti, it is real acting, for we, like yourself, are prisoners."

"Never while—"

But the sentence remained unfinished, as a blow upon the head, from a pistol in the hands of his captor, sent Tudor Vashti stunned to the deck, and instantly he was seized and securely ironed.

When his senses returned to him, the fugitive officer found himself in the cabin of the Black Dove, and around him were several he recognized, and among them Holbrook Friedland, Leo Paulding and Percy Manning, while his masked captor stood near.

"Captain Vashti, I am glad that you have returned to consciousness, for I was about parting with your officers, and you may have some word to send to London," said Brandt Greyhurst quietly, and whose mask, constantly worn, had prevented his recognition by any of his former brother officers.

"What do you mean, sir?" was the sullen question.

"I mean, sir, that I have taken this vessel for my own use, and return to Mr. Friedland the king's yacht, which I borrowed for a short time, and in it he can return to London and report that instead of the Lance taking the pirate, she caught a Tartar, and the Demon Sailor took her."

"As for yourself, Tudor Vashti, you remain with me, and a letter to the king will give my reasons for keeping you."

"If his majesty replies favorably to my letter, sent through Mr. Friedland, you are in no danger at present at my hands; but if an unfavorable response is received from his royal highness, then I swear to you I shall hang you to the yard-arm, and sail through the English channel with you hanging there."

All started at the vindictive tone of their captor, while Tudor Vashti, groaned, rather than said:

"In Heaven's name who are you?"

"Your untiring foe, Tudor Vashti," was the fierce response, and then in the pleasant manner he had assumed in addressing the other officers, he continued:

"Gentlemen, your boat awaits to bear you on board the Lance; a pleasant voyage, and should you wish to again meet the Demon Pirate, you will find him on the high seas."

Brandt Greyhurst bowed low as he spoke, and Holbrook Friedland and the other young officers arose, while Tudor Vashti, ironed hand and foot, said pleadingly:

"Do not leave me."

"We can do nothing, Captain Vashti, I regret to say."

"Can you not fight it out with this devil incarnate?"

"No, sir, for the guns of the Lance are all spiked, and his crew more than double ours."

"Where is Lieutenant Morley?"

"He went on board the training ship at Southampton, Tudor Vashti, to get a crew for the Lance, while his vessel was becalmed some leagues out, and learning his errand, I threw my men on board in the guise of honest English tars," said Brandt Greyhurst.

"Curses upon you! ay, upon you all for a set of cowards," cried the enraged officer, and angered at his words, Holbrook Friedland and the others turned away, and with a cold salute, given to his rank only, left the cabin and entered their boat.

A few moments more and the Lance and the Black Dove parted company, the former en route to London, and the latter to recklessly skim the blue waters under a free flag.

CHAPTER XXXVII

A GAME IN WHICH NONE OF THE PLAYERS
HELD TRUMPS.

To depict the mortification and regret of Enoch Shylock the Jew, at the termination of the wedding scene, and the despair of the beautiful Adina, would be impossible.

For once the cunning and daring Israelite was at a loss how to extricate himself from the difficulty, or in what way to aid his newly-made son-in-law.

Fully acquainted with London life in all its phases, and knowing well who and what Fred Shirley was, Enoch was aware that Captain Vashti was a prisoner, from the moment the detective chief entered the house, and, knowing that the forged notes had been taken up, by Ross Vashti, for so the clerk had reported, he felt assured that the affair had been reported to the king and feared for the result.

But, after calm reflection and conversation with his daughter, they both arrived at the conclusion that the king would not really harm his own son, but intended giving him a severe fright that would cause him to change his wild mode of life.

This idea gaining ground as they talked it over, the color came back into their faces, and the Jew was himself again.

But only for a short time, for a wild cry in his shop, brought back the livid hue to the faces of both father and child, and sent the blood in cold torrents to their hearts.

"In the name of Joshua! what ails you?" cried the Jew excitedly, as his clerk dashed into the magnificently-furnished room where he sat with his daughter.

"The coach! the stranger! the captain!" cried the young Israelite in broken and terrified accents, and, unable to learn aught from him, and hearing voices in the street, Enoch Shylock hastily descended to the shop, before the door of which he saw a vehicle, surrounded by an excited, chattering crowd of humanity.

"In Abraham's name, what has happened, friends?" he tremblingly asked, in Hebrew, for nearly all present he recognized as people of his own race.

"I will tell you, sir, and I have sent for officers of the city," cried the coachman, approaching the Jew, whom he recognized as the owner of the house that he had driven his fares to.

"Do you see that form in there?" and he pointed to the dead body of poor Shirley.

"Yes."

"Well, sir, not an hour ago he drove away from this door as well as you or I, and with him was Captain Vashti, whom I know well."

"Well, well!" said Enoch Shylock, impatiently, as the excited coachman paused.

"Well it is not, though, but very bad; for I took the captain to the St. James water stairs, and he told me to drive back here with his friend."

"And I did so, and there lies his friend in my coach, cold and stiff, and a knife-thrust in his heart, and marks on his neck, and you know but one man could have done the deed."

Cautiously the Jew approached the vehicle and gazed in upon the pallid face of the man he had so lately seen in life, and, as the guardians of the city's peace now approached at a double-quick, he turned and bounded into the house, and bursting into the room where his daughter paced anxiously to and fro, he cried:

"Oh, child! child! we are ruined! utterly ruined!"

"Speak, father, what is it!" she cried, in commanding tones, and the beauty of her soft eyes gave place to a devil that slumbered in them, and suddenly showed her true nature.

"I am done, and your exalted ambition has brought sin and shame upon us," whined Enoch Shylock, seemingly overcome with grief and fear.

"Speak, sir!" and her eyes flashed with fiendish fury.

"I will speak, girl; I will tell you that your ambition to wed the son of a king, has ruined me; you sought, and I, doating upon you, obeyed you, to place yourself, Jewess though you are, upon a peer with the noblest dames of England, by marrying a scion of royalty."

"Well, I plotted and planned, and with the jewel in our grasp, the cup of nectar to our lips, for, well we knew that the king's early marriage was a true one, and could not be annulled by the wish of the few old fools that said it should be, and that he could be made to recognize Tudor as his first legitimate heir, I say, just as we ascended the dazzling ladder

of our ambition, the jewel we find but paste, the cup of nectar but gall, and the golden ladder crumbles beneath our step, and we fall, never to rise again."

"Father, you are an old cowardly fool, for I do not give up because he has been accused of forgery, for the king will not allow shame to fall upon his son."

"Girl, you are the fool; it might have been well, had not his own hot head have brought the crash, for, on the way to the palace, he killed the king's chief detective, sent here after him, and, knowing Tudor Vashti as I do, I will wager the earnings of my life that he is now flying to sea in his vessel, and—"

"The God of the Israelite have mercy upon me."

The wail of the now thoroughly crushed girl broke in upon the words of her father, and he sprang quickly to her side and caught her in his arms, just as she was falling.

Gently he laid her down upon a velvet divan, and called to servants to fetch a surgeon and the rabbi.

The latter arrived first and bent over the beautiful form and marble face, and said sorrowfully:

"Enoch, my brother of Israel, she feels no sorrow, for her heart is broken, its throbbing is forever stilled, and her bridal robe will be her shroud."

A groan broke from the lips of the poor father, who had sinned for her he loved so deeply, and bending above the dead form, he murmured:

"The God of the Hebrew forgive thee, Adina, and forgive thy old father, who from this day will devote his life to deeds of good, and his fortune to charity for the welfare of both the Hebrew and the Christian."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE DISCOVERY.

WHEN the king, knowing the crime which Tudor Vashti, his wicked son, had been guilty of, after a consultation with Ross Vashti, ordered his chief detective to arrest him and carry him to the Tower, there to be confined in the life cell, he had no desire to let the profligate end his days there, for he was secretly very much attached to the young officer.

But, after a short stay there, he thought it would be well to visit him in disguise, and offer him certain inducements to forever leave England, not doubting that the prisoner would be most delighted to accept clemency instead of a life-long imprisonment.

Somewhat anxiously he awaited the return of his officer, for he was desirous of knowing how his unruly son had taken his arrest, and he was congratulating himself that he would frighten the reckless captain of his yacht into a life of rectitude, when an officer entered.

"Did you give my official communication to the lieutenant, sir," he asked quickly.

It was his aide, Saunders, who, the reader will remember bore the orders to Paul Morley to sail in the Lance immediately, for, by sending the yacht to sea at once the king hoped to conceal the fact that Captain Vashti had not gone in command of her, intending in a short while to have some plausible rumor spread abroad regarding the absence of the young commander of his favorite vessel.

"I did, your majesty, and the Lance was flying down the Thames ere I reached the water stairs," answered the aide, in response to the king's question.

"It is well; but what means that excitement without?" and an angry flush covered the king's face, as he heard loud voices in the corridor leading to his private audience room, for he was in the same chamber where he had held the interview with his unworthy son some weeks before.

"I will ascertain, your majesty, regarding this disrespect to your highness," replied Saunders hastily; but ere he could leave the room an officer of high rank entered and said:

"I crave your majesty's most humble pardon; but one of your trusted officers, your highness, has been foully murdered."

"One of my officers murdered, General St. Viel?"

"It is true, your majesty."

"And who is he?"

"Secret Service Chief, Shirley, your—"

General St. Viel stopped short, startled by the cry that broke from the king's lips.

"Shirley dead, and slain by whom?" asked his majesty, by a great effort of self-control regaining command over his feelings.

"He entered a vehicle, it seems, your majesty, in the Jews' quarter of the city, in company with Captain Tudor Vashti, I regret to say, and—"

"Go on, sir!" came the stern command, although the general was speaking as rapidly as he could.

"I will, your majesty; the driver was ordered to drive to your highness's palace, he says, and then the order was changed to the Tower, and again to the St. James water stairs, and then Captain Vashti left the vehicle and bade the coachman to take his friend, meaning Shirley, your majesty, back to the Jews' quarter."

"Well, sir, well?"

"When he arrived there he found Shirley dead inside, and a wound in his side, from a knife, and marks of violence upon his throat; this is all I can tell your majesty of the sad affair."

"God knows, General St. Viel, it is enough; but send at once to all parts of the city, and have Captain Tudor Vashti brought to my presence," and the king's voice trembled as he gave the order.

But, as the reader knows, the search proved fruitless, and the Black Dove having taken such sudden flight, seemed conclusive evidence to the king, and Ross Vashti whom he sent for, that the fugitive had determined upon some bold and desperate plan.

Fully aroused to action, and determined to punish his son by death, the king dispatched couriers to the different seaports, to order vessels of war in pursuit of the American-built craft, with orders to bring back her daring commander, dead or alive; but the days passed by and no tidings of his capture came, until Lieutenant Paul Morley suddenly arrived and reported the mysterious disappearance of his vessel from Southampton.

And quickly on the heels of this report the Lance swept up the Thames and dropped anchor off the Tower, while Holbrook Friedland and Leo Paulding landed, and drove in all haste to the palace, and urged an immediate audience with the king.

Learning of the return of his yacht, the king granted the audience, and the young officers were ushered into the royal presence and their startling story was soon told, and the letter given them for his majesty was delivered, and the seal quickly broken.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AN EPISTLE TO A KING.

WITH stern, set lips, blazing eyes, and a hand that, in spite of his self-command, trembled as it held the paper, the king read twice over the letter written him by the masked pirate, whom none of the young officers, or the crew of the Lance had once suspected as being Brandt Greyhurst, the unfortunate midshipman, and a victim of their former captain.

The letter read as follows:

"AT SEA, September 10th.,

"On Board Pirate Schooner,

"Black Dove.

"To His Majesty, KING OF ENGLAND:

"SIRE:—A former unworthy subject of Your Highness, and now an unfortunate man branded with crime and ignominy, begs that you will peruse these lines and consider well their meaning.

"Belonging to a race that has served your majesty's Government in the past, and now the last of his name, I call upon your majesty to judge if I was not driven to the wall by misrepresentations and cruelly cut off from a plea in my own behalf.

"Beggared by a man who hated my father, I went to sea, and the future was bright before me, for a fair maiden had pledged me her undying love; but when in the West Indies, serving your majesty, I received news from home that the hated foe who had beggared me, was to tear from me my intended bride, I asked for leave of your majesty's commander, Captain Tudor Vashti, to return to England; it was cruelly refused.

"Determined to return I wrote my resignation from your majesty's naval service, and that too, being refused, I left the vessel, was retaken as a deserter, brought home in irons, to be sent to the Tower and executed, and barely escaped the doom.

"But, under the misrepresentation of Captain Tudor Vashti, I was branded in your majesty's name as a Deserter and Felon, and a reward offered for me dead or alive.

"Seeking in disguise the home of my youth, I found that she whom I loved was the bride of Ross Vashti, the man who had beggared my race, and then, a hunted being, in utter despair, I broke the law of the land, and became what I now am, a pirate, and known as Fire Eye the Demon Sailor.

"Your officers will tell your majesty of my capture of your yacht, and that I harmed none of them, and then how I made Captain Tudor Vashti my prisoner.

"And now, holding him my prisoner, I beg to say to your majesty, that I will return him in safety to your hands, if your majesty will withdraw the names of Deserter and Felon you have branded me with and give me full pardon for my piratical offenses against you.

"If your majesty refuses my prayer, then I will hang Captain Tudor Vashti to the yard-arm of the vessel I have taken from him, and with him there hanging, will cruise the length of the English channel."

"Your majesty can send me my pardon by an officer on the Lance, and I will deliver to him Captain Tudor Vashti; if your majesty refuses, let the Lance meet me off the mouth of the Thames, any day the week following this, and signal your majesty's reply."

I am, your majesty's former
"Obedient subject,
"BRANDT GREYHURST."

Thrice over the king read this strange epistle, and then, while his brow grew black as a thundercloud, he said:

"He may hang Tudor Vashti, and it will be a fitting fate for him, and he shall know that I give no pardon to pirates."

Then turning to an aide, he continued:

"Send word to the admiralty, that I desire a naval officer of tried skill and courage, and a picked crew, placed at once on board the Lance, which will at once set sail in pursuit of this Demon Sailor, and sink or capture the vessel he has stolen from me."

The order was promptly sent, Holbrook Friedland and his shipmate returned on board the Lance, and two hours after the fleet craft was bound on her mission of death.

CHAPTER XL.

THE CRUISER AND THE CORSAIR.

In spite of the king's cruisers everywhere searching for him, Brandt Greyhurst deliberately put in toward the mouth of the Thames, at the appointed time, to keep his rendezvous with the Lance.

With wistful eyes he looked for the well-known sails of the yacht, and hoped that she would soon appear, bearing his pardon.

"That will take the brand off my brow," he murmured, as he paced to and fro the quarter-deck, and, with the gold I found in the old castle, I will go to America and live; but I will not forget my revenge against Tudor Vashti, for the cruel wrong he did me, for he made me what I am; nor will I forget Ross Vashti, for he too shall feel my revenge. When these two debts are paid I will live, or die content. Ah Lois! Lois! if you had only been true to me, how different would our lives have been!" and he turned away to prevent MacGregor, who stood near, from seeing the tears that welled up into the brilliant black eyes, whose blazing luster had caused his crew to call him Captain Fire Eye.

Glancing aloft, to where his flag floated, an eye of fire in a black field, he continued:

"There fly my colors, Lois, taken from the ring you sent, little dreaming you sent it to me; ah, me! how will all this end, I wonder?"

Again he turned away, and as he did so, there came the cry:

"Sail ho!"

"Whereaway?" rung out in his clear voice.

"Coming out of the river, sir."

"I see her; yes, it is the Lance. Send the men to quarters, Mr. MacGregor, for we know not what that craft brings to us, weal or woe."

"Ay, ay, sir," and the roll of the drum sent the willing crew to their guns.

After glancing at his men, and then over his vessel, Brandt Greyhurst descended to the cabin, and stood face to face with the man who had so wronged him.

"Tudor Vashti, the Lance is in sight, and you know what it brings for you and me," he said, sternly.

The face of the prisoner was haggard and white, and his hands were ironed.

Looking into the face of his captor—for after the two vessels separated, Brandt Greyhurst had removed his mask, and with horror the fugitive officer saw who was his captor—the answer came in slow measured words:

"Yes, I know that she bears either good or evil tidings for you or me; but I feel that the king will grant you the pardon you ask for yourself and crew, and my life will be safe, though that I will be punished for deeds I have done, I know; but he will not have me executed, no he will not do that."

"Why should he?" asked the young pirate captain, who, it will be remembered, was in ignorance of all that had occurred.

"Of course he will not," was the quick, evasive reply.

"Well, if he refuses to pardon me, then you must die, for I have sworn it, and then the king shall regret that he turned the Black Dove into a sea hyena," and with burning eyes and set lips, the young sailor returned once more to the deck.

The Lance in the mean time had run out into open water, and was not more than a league away, for the Black Dove had swiftly approached her also.

Nearer and nearer the two vessels drew to each other, the captain of the Lance concealing from observation the extra crew he had on board, and endeavoring to get as near as possible to the Black Dove before he signaled the message of the king.

To further guard against suspicion the men on the Lance were not at their guns, and it really looked as though a peaceful interview was anticipated, and the heart of the pirate captain beat high with hope; but he was not to be caught off his guard, and had made every preparation to meet his foe with fire, if hostility was intended.

Calmly the pirates stood at their guns, alternately eying the Lance and their young commander, in whose skill and courage they had perfect confidence.

"It looks as though we were going to live honest men in future, captain, and that Vashti would escape the noose rigged for him," said MacGregor.

"So it seems, MacGregor—ha! there flies the signal."

"And read it."

And in loud tones, that reached every member of his crew the pirate captain read:

"Tudor Vashti deserves death at the yard-arm of a pirate craft!"

"No pardon to buccaneers!"

"Death to the Demon Sailor, in the king's name!"

Hardly had the sound of the young captain's voice died away, when a sheet of flame burst from the broadside of the Lance, and a shower of iron came flying over the Black Dove.

"Bring up the prisoner!" shouted the pirate, in hoarse tones, for the answer to his letter to the king had been a cruel blow.

Out of the cabin the prisoner was dragged, now calm, but as white as the corpse he knew he would soon become, and around his haughty neck the noose was placed.

"Tudor Vashti, you made me what I am, as in your heart you know it, and I revenge myself upon you by visiting upon you the doom I may one day meet."

"Up with him lads!"

A prayer was choked off of the stern, band-some lips, and up into the air the elegant form was dragged, while a wild yell of fury broke from the pirate crew, and was drowned by another broadside from the Lance.

"Let him hang there! now, pirates that you are, fight for your lives, for yonder vessel has come to show no mercy; fire!"

The Black Dove reeled under the discharge of her guns, and instantly the combat became hot and fierce.

But such a combat could not last long, for the king's cruiser fought with picked men, confident in their numbers, and the Black Dove's crew fought for life alone, and all felt that it was a battle to the bitter end, to the very death.

And thus the moments flew by in the red encounter, until at last the Lance was seen to settle badly in the bows, and the pirates knew she was hard hit, and fought with more desperate determination to conquer.

"She has her death-wound, lads; sink her!" cried the captain, bleeding from several wounds, and a wild cheer followed his command, and an answering huzza came from the king's brave tars, as they stood at their guns, with the waters washing their feet.

Another fearful broadside from the Black Dove, which had escaped severe injury strangely in the mad havoc, another wild cheer from the buccaneers, another defiant huzza from the English tars, and down beneath the encrimsoned waves shot the Lance from sight, carrying her gallant crew to the depths of the blue waters.

For a moment a silence fell upon the pirates; but then they were roused by the voice of their young chief, shouting:

"To work, lads, for see the hounds of war are upon us; crowd on sail, and ho! for up the channel, with yonder form to adorn our rigging," and he pointed first to two large vessels of war crowding on all sail to reach the scene, and then to the body of Tudor Vashti torn by shot, and swinging to and fro, a ghastly sight.

"Crowd on sail, lads, and aid us ye winds, if ye blow a tempest, for the gallant Sea Hyena, as now I name my noble craft, must not go down until she has traced the broad seas with crimson trails."

"Three cheers, lads, for the Sea Hyena!"

And with a will they were given while the shot-torn, but still stanch craft bounded away at a speed that showed the cruisers in her wake that pursuit was idle.

CHAPTER XLI.

AFTER LONG YEARS.

YEARS have passed away, kind reader, since the Black Dove, re-christened the Sea Hyena, sunk the king's yacht and her gallant crew, and spread terror along the entire coast, until even the humble fisher dared not spread his sail.

After fulfilling his terrible threat, and sailing from one end of the channel to the other, with the ghastly form of Tudor Vashti swinging in the rigging, Brandt Greyhurst seemed to have turned into a human bloodhound, for no mercy to his fellow man was his motto, and from sea to sea, and land to land the terror of his name spread, while his wonderful escape from the numerous war vessels constantly in search of him, made the superstitious believe that he was protected by Satan himself.

Of those who have figured in my story in London, I can only say that the king's career has gone down to history, and need not be touched upon here; and, as to Enoch Shylock the Jew, he kept his word, and to the end of his life did good to atone for the evil he had done, in his greed for gold and ambitious desires.

Two other characters of my romance, I would still follow with an author's privilege, and note the changes in their lives.

Those two are Ross Vashti and his wife, the Lady Lois.

For awhile all that Ross Vashti touched seemed to turn to gold; but at last the tide of fortune turned, and speculation took from him not only the greater part of his own, but the inheritance he gained through his wife, and he begged the king to send him to America as Governor of the Carolinas.

And there it is that I would follow them, for prosperity again perched upon the head of Ross Vashti, when once settled in America, and gold flowing into his coffers, he built in the New World a home that was equal to Castle Sealands, which debt had wrested from him.

In this lovely abode, one pleasant afternoon, eighteen years after this story opened, with the scene in Castle Sealands, Governor Ross Vashti was seated among his books, enjoying the balmy breeze that came in through the open windows overlooking the sea, and little dreaming that a shadow was already falling across his threshold.

Presently a young and beautiful girl, almost the counterpart of what Lady Lois had been eighteen years before, glided into the room, attired in riding habit and hat.

"Come, father, join us in our ride this afternoon," she said coaxingly.

"No, Lois my child, not this afternoon, for if I must confess it I am really lazy," was the Governor's reply; and then drawing the beautiful girl toward him, he asked anxiously:

"Lois, who is to be your escort?"

The young girl blushed, and seeing it, her father said:

"My child, it is that Cuban planter, who has lately settled in our midst?"

"Yes, father."

"Lois, from some reason, I cannot explain why, I do not like Don Castilla."

"I love him, papa, and he loves me," broke passionately from the girl's lips.

"Lois, strange as it may seem, I would rather see you dead, than the bride of that man, and I will never consent to your marriage with him; but dry your pretty eyes, and another time we will talk on this subject, yet know now, that I forbid you to encourage him."

The maiden turned sadly away, and as she passed out on the balcony Lady Lois entered by the hall door.

A regally beautiful woman she still was, and yet it was not a face that one cared to look long upon, for the depth of sadness far back in the eyes, the look of constant suffering that seemed to haunt the exquisitely molded mouth, told of sorrows in the past ever present in the heart, and reflecting upon each feature, strive as she might to hide from view the gnawing grief that fed upon her life, yet did not consume it.

"Husband, I have come to speak to you about Lois and Don Castilla," she said in her soft way.

"I have just spoken to her upon the sub-

ject, my dear; like myself, I feel that you are opposed to the Cuban."

"Yes, and yet why I cannot tell, for he is a courtly gentleman, is generous to a fault, has most fascinating manners, though at times it seems to me the fascination of a snake, and evidently comes of good blood; but then his face troubles me when I look into it, and haunts me when he is not here."

"It is the same with me, wife; but do you think he loves Lois?"

"He seems to idolize her."

"And Lois?"

"I am confident loves him."

"What is to be done then about it?"

"Refuse him her hand, for I know he will ask it."

"I will, so do not let the matter worry you more."

The wife seemed content, and withdrew, and the Governor flattered himself that happiness would not fly from his household.

And that night Don Juan Castilla asked for the hand of the Governor's daughter and was refused, and took his leave, while poor Lois lay upon her bed and wept scalding, bitter tears, for to the Cuban she had given her first and only love; but she would not disregard the wishes of her parents, and determined to bury her lost love forever from sight of the world, though she knew that she could never forget the grave in her heart, over which twined the tendrils of her affections.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE DEMAND.

It had been a day of great excitement in Bathtown, in the present State of North Carolina, and the people were all astir and anxious, for a vessel had run into the harbor and reported that the dreaded buccaneer, known far and wide and feared the world over as Fire-Eye, the Demon Sailor and the Sea Hyena, had sunk a king's privateer and two merchantmen some leagues out at sea, and chased it into port.

So great was the terror felt of this dread rover that the forts were manned with treble the force, the militia was kept under arms, and all were most anxious for fear the Sea Hyena might run into Bathtown harbor, for the daring pirate had done so before, and also visited other cities along the coast.

Wearied with the duties devolving upon him the Governor had strolled to a little pine forest in which was a rustic arbor, to steal a short rest ere night came on.

Seating himself, he drew a book from his pocket to read; but his eyes merely scanned the lines, and weary nature soon lulled him to sleep.

"You are Governor Ross Vashti, I believe?"

The voice awoke the Governor with a start, and he beheld before him a swarthy-faced man, with white hair, but a form that denoted activity and strength scarcely looked for in one who had journeyed some distance beyond the meridian of life.

The man was dressed in deep black, and had one arm.

"Yes; I am Governor Vashti; who are you, and what do you wish in my grounds?"

"I am here to remind you of an oath you took long years ago."

The Governor turned pale, but said, firmly:

"I recall no oaths that I made, in which you are interested."

"Perhaps this ring may refresh your memory, your excellency."

The Governor took the ring extended to him with a trembling hand.

"Where did you get this?"

"You recall it?"

"Yes," was the almost inarticulate reply.

"You know what I have a right to demand?"

"Good God! are you Satan in another guise?" cried the Governor.

"It matters not who I am; are you ready to give up your soul or grant the request I demand, as bearer of this ring?"

"Oh! I will grant anything, only do not take my life and destroy my soul," groaned the unhappy man.

"You swear to grant what I ask?"

"Yes, I swear."

"My request is a simple one: give your consent to your daughter to become the wife of Don Juan Castilla."

"My wife, the Lady Lois, will object."

"I will see to that; do you swear to give

your consent that your daughter shall become the wife of Juan Castilla within the month?"

"I do."

"Enough; go!"

No second bidding was needed, and, with very undignified haste the Governor went back toward his mansion, fully convinced that he was going to have one allied in some mysterious way to Satan as a son-in-law.

The stranger stood gazing after the Governor with a peculiar smile upon his face, and then made a wide detour and gained the flower gardens, which were the favorite resort of the Lady Lois.

Good fortune seemed to favor him, for he found Lady Vashti seated in her favorite evergreen arbor, engaged in embroidery, a favorite pastime with her.

She started at seeing a stranger, and would have retreated; but noticing that he had but one arm, she deemed him some officer of the navy, or army, and hesitated, while he said in a kindly tone:

"Feel no fear of me, Lady Lois Vashti."

"I cannot recall that we have before met, sir."

"And yet we have, lady, long years ago."

"In England, I suppose?"

"Yes, lady, at Sealands."

The woman started, and her face paled, but she said calmly:

"Your name, please?"

"MacGregor."

"What! you are—"

"The smuggler who escorted you home that night; you kept your pledge well, Lady Lois."

"What do you here, sir?" she asked in almost a whisper.

"This ring may explain."

"Hal! it is my fire eye opal."

"It is, lady."

"Well, what means your bringing it back to me?"

"To recall a promise, lady."

"Ah, I fear me trouble to come."

"You said you would befriend the one to whom you sent this ring, and he now asks a favor of you."

"It was whispered that Brandt Greyhurst leagued himself with the coast smugglers and afterward became a pirate," she said, moodily.

"True, lady, so it was rumored."

"And that that cruel fiend—oh! I dare not call his name, and, no! no! I will not believe it; yes, I will do as the one asks to whom I sent that ring."

"The request is simple; that one whom he knows well be permitted to claim your daughter's hand in marriage."

"Heaven have mercy! who is he?" she asked in quivering tones.

"Don Castilla of Cuba."

"And he knows that the Don loves my daughter and that we refuse to allow the alliance?"

"Yes."

"What know you of Don Castilla?"

"He is a noble man to his friends."

"Well, I know not what to say."

"Keep your pledge, lady."

"But my husband will refuse to permit the marriage."

"He will not: do you say yes?"

"Oh, yes, for I can say nothing else, and I know that Lois dearly loves him."

"Enough! one month from to-day the Don will come in his yacht to claim his bride, for he has already sailed from Bathtown, as you doubtless know, lady."

"Yes," she said dreamily, and with eyes bent down she stood in painful reverie for some minutes.

When she again looked up her strange companion had disappeared, and with a shudder, she hastily returned to the mansion.

CHAPTER XLIII.

CONCLUSION.

NEVER had the Carolina and Virginia coasts suffered so heavily from the ravages of piracy, as the month following the visit of MacGregor the smuggler to Governor Vashti and his wife, and the citizens of the towns, and the planters were kept in constant dread.

And yet the gossips kept up their interest in one important event to happen, and that was the marriage of the beautiful Lois, the Governor's daughter, to the wealthy Cuban, Don Juan Castilla.

Happy that her parents had changed their mind regarding her handsome lover, Lois

sought not to dive into the reasons, and was busy with her maids day and night in arranging her trousseau, such as a maiden of her rank should have, and her father spared no expense to have the affair, as it must be, the grandest event his dominion had witnessed.

A vessel arriving from Cuba had brought letters to the intended bride and her parents, from Don Juan, and most costly presents of laces and jewels, and the yacht was daily expected to arrive with its master.

But the day of its arrival passed, and it came not, and the croakers shook their heads ominously, and predicted that the Sea Hyena had captured the Cuban.

But, shortly after nightfall a flash was seen far out to sea, and then another, still further off, and it resolved itself into a sea chase, although the vessels could not be seen.

Nearer and nearer came the two vessels, the pursued and pursuing, hotter and hotter sounded the guns, and then the firing suddenly ceased, and into the harbor swept a beautiful craft, and dropping anchor, who should land but Don Juan Castilla, who reported that he had been chased by the Sea Hyena?

A right royal welcome he received too, for had he not beaten off the dread pursuer?

And the next morn the nuptials, between the Cuban and Governor's daughter were celebrated, with great pomp and ceremony, and the lovely bride went on board the graceful and rakish craft of her husband, accompanied by her parents and a gay company to bid her a last farewell.

One by one the company said good-by, and then only four persons remained in the yacht's cabin. Those four were the Don, his bride, and her parents, the two last intending to sail a league from shore and return in their own boat.

"Governor Ross Vashti," said the Don, as the yacht began to glide through the water, "do you recognize this person?"

Both the Governor and his wife started, as MacGregor suddenly appeared before them.

With a smile the Don continued:

"Governor Vashti, you are the man who ruined the Greyhursts of Sealands, and stole from Brandt Greyhurst, the last of his race, his promised bride."

"Lady Lois, you broke your pledge to Brandt Greyhurst, and that broken pledge made him swear revenge, and upon you both he has had his revenge, ay, a bitter vengeance indeed, for I am he who was once called Brandt Greyhurst, and your daughter is my wife; but not here ends your anguish; for I am the Demon Sailor, Fire Eye the Pirate, and you now are on board the Sea Hyena!"

A wild shriek rung through the cabin, and Lady Lois sunk on the floor unconscious, and with a groan of anguish her husband bent over her, crying:

"Yes, bitter indeed has been his revenge, for my child is a buccaneer's bride."

And that child?

Poor Lois stood like one dazed for an instant, and then burst forth in peals of merriest laughter, that floated far across the waters.

"Great God! you have crazed her brain," cried old MacGregor.

"Silence sir! and put the honored Governor and the Lady Lois in their boat," was the stern command, and quickly it was obeyed, and the slaves, with scared faces pulled rapidly shoreward, to tell what they had heard and seen, while the Sea Hyena sailed seaward into the gathering gloom, for a storm was sweeping rapidly over the ocean, and, until she was lost in the mist of the hurricane, the wild, merry laughter of the buccaneer's bride floated back over the waters.

When the slaves rowed the boat ashore, at the villa landing, their mistress was gently borne to the mansion, the Governor following in silence, and for long days she lay at the point of death; but at last she rallied and once more went about her household duties, but from the day of her daughter's marriage to the hour of her death, years after, no smile ever dwelt upon her face, for her heart was broken.

And the Governor, a sorrowing old man held on to life until four-score years, hoping against hope to one day see his child again.

But the hope was vain, for, from her sailing that afternoon and dashing into the very teeth of the storm, the Sea Hyena was never heard of again, and it was believed that she had gone down in the tempest, to find a resting-place in the deep sea and hide her blood-red decks forever from human eye.

THE END.

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